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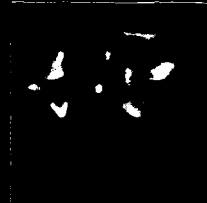
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# ***El Salvador at War***

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***An Oral History of Conflict  
from the 1979 Insurrection  
to the Present***

**Edited by Max G. Manwaring  
and Court Prisk**

**With a Preface by  
Ambassador Edwin G. Corr**

**1988**

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To those who read *Das Kapital* and raised the sounds of warning. To those who read *Mein Kampf* and called the democratic world to arms. To those who read Mao's words, "Fight Fight, Talk Talk, Fight Fight," and told of their threat.

## Foreword

TO UNDERSTAND INSURGENT conflict in the Third World, Americans must recognize the nature of the struggle between totalitarianism and democracy. The insurgency in El Salvador in the 1980s is not a mass movement, but a carefully scripted strategy executed by an educated and disciplined elite. This insurgent group is not in revolt against a government or its military, *per se*. Rather it is reacting against corruption, racial and religious discrimination, foreign intervention, and inability or unwillingness of a government to protect and be responsible to the general population. The revolutionary elite uses political, economic, and social grievances as justification for its actions. This struggle between insurgent and incumbent is over who has the moral right to govern. Such is the probable nature of future conflict, and it is with that understanding that any appropriate response must begin.

*El Salvador at War* is an oral history of the Salvadoran struggle. In an illuminating departure from conventional histories of war, Max Manwaring and Court Prisk trace the major contours of the conflict. Their book tells what key individuals think about the war, what the really important lessons are, and what the participants *should* have learned. It is their perspective, their truth, recorded here—what a number of the key participants see as historical fact and a basis for action.

Studying the fundamental nature of insurgent conflict is key to understanding this most prevalent form of twentieth-century conventional war. In examining insurgent conflict, *El Salvador at War* offers some new insights into our role in contemporary international security.



BRADLEY C. HOSMER  
LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U.S. AIR FORCE  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL DEFENSE  
UNIVERSITY

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## *Preface*

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT BOOK.

Max Manwaring and Court Prisk uniquely permit the major actors involved to tell the story of the struggle between the United States supported Salvadoran democrats and the Cuban-Nicaraguan supported Marxist-Leninist guerrillas. The type of conflict confronted in El Salvador is known by many names—revolutionary war, the struggle for national liberation, guerrilla war, low-intensity conflict, prolonged people's war, insurgency, protracted conflict. The phenomenon is not new to history, but to North Americans such conflicts have become particularly important because they almost universally are supported and frequently are fostered from abroad by Communist governments that regard the United States as their principal adversary.

There is an increase of this kind of hostility and a corresponding greater likelihood that our country will be engaged in similar contests for years to come. It thus becomes imperative that we learn from our experience. This type of armed political struggle requires national persistence and will and involves the promotion of constitutional democracy, political warfare (including the foreign manipulation of the American body politic), foreign support for subversives, propaganda, economic development, and diplomacy. In dealing with these pressing issues, this book is both engaging and valuable. It presents the candid opinions of many of the most important participants at different stages of the Salvadoran struggle. It suggests and allows the reader to draw conclusions, and it provides a wealth of lessons to be learned.

When I arrived in San Salvador in the summer of 1985 to assume my responsibilities as the American Ambassador, I was pleased to see firsthand how sound United States Government policy was for Central America and how well the programs to

achieve our objectives were being implemented in El Salvador. Today, in 1988, I am even more convinced of the correctness of our Central American policy and of the manner in which we are strongly supporting and closely collaborating with the democratic governments of this region. The contrast between our efforts in Central America and those in Southeast Asia, where I also served as a diplomat during the tragic years of 1972 to 1975 (when America's defeat there became final), is striking.

There are numerous reasons why I am convinced of the correctness of U.S. policy especially in El Salvador. Included in the book is an interview in which I discuss and assess progress in the five areas that the American Embassy in San Salvador observes, analyzes, and provides support for Salvadoran programs. In their totality they constitute the areas where success is essential in order to consolidate a lasting constitutional democracy. Failure in any one of the five areas would mean eventual failure in them all, and their order of priority varies with the evolving situation and the total progress being made toward democracy.

As you read this book you will come to know, as I do, that El Salvador is and will remain for some years an underdeveloped Third World country. The resource base is minimal. The politico-economic structure is regressive. The war is only the most obvious problem. The challenge is and has been to create the infrastructure, protect it from destruction, and lay the groundwork for a rational and equitable economic system. This goal involves not just the internal restructuring of the country's economy but also changing the import laws of industrialized countries, which currently restrict the products of developing countries, and creating mechanisms to ensure more constant and fairer prices in the international market for their exports.

With respect to El Salvador's role in Central America, events begun in El Salvador have given impetus to a situation in which four of the five Central American countries are now democracies, even if fragile ones, and contrast sharply with Nicaragua where the design of the Sandinistas has been to

consolidate a Marxist-Leninist state. Recognizing that Costa Rica has a long tradition of democracy, it is my firm belief that President Duarte's leadership and persistence have been the major force behind the creation of democratic institutions in his country and have served as an example to the other nations. Certainly his deep belief in democracy has played an important role in garnering congressional support for President Reagan's Central American policy.

Seven years of unflagging Salvadoran effort, personal sacrifice, a limited American presence, and the investment of considerable United States resources—though still small in comparison to our current outlays in the Middle East or previous expenditures in Southeast Asia—have thus far precluded a Communist military takeover in El Salvador. The effort has stabilized the economy and provided sufficient social peace to begin laying the foundations for institutionalization of a constitutional, multiparty democratic system with equity and justice.

Another indicator of progress has been that the Salvadorans, with our material and training support, have reduced full-time combatant strength of the guerrillas from over 12,000 to less than two-thirds that number. But, the insurgency nevertheless remains at an institutionally threatening level. Any slackening militarily on the part of the government, regression of the democratization process, or failure of the economy to begin growing could bring a resurgence of guerrilla strength. The back of the guerrillas has not yet been broken. To do this, we need to maintain or increase current levels of assistance so that the Salvadoran government can win its war—not merely provide enough aid to keep Salvadorans from losing their battle. This is difficult at a time of Gramm/Rudman/Hollings budget limitations, fatigue by the Congress after seven years of support, and the emergence of other problems that reduce Washington's responsiveness and capacity to provide backing required.

There are many reasons, beyond the challenges mentioned, why I consider it a great privilege to be the American Chief of Mission in El Salvador and am thankful for the opportunity to

direct the work that has been done so effectively and efficiently by the United States Government to protect and to advance the interests of democracy here. I am proud to join the ranks of distinguished Ambassadors who have been my predecessors in El Salvador, such as Deane Hinton and Tom Pickering, and of U.S. Southern Command Commanders-in-Chief, such as Generals Paul Gorman, Jack Galvin, and Fred Woerner. The United States has been extremely fortunate to have the quality of men and women that "the system" has chosen to assign El Salvador at all levels, both military and civilian. The United States' success in El Salvador has derived in large part from Embassy support by and close collaboration with the United States Southern Command, from the highest level of support within the Executive, and from the necessary minimum level of bipartisan support of the Congress for President Duarte—though this support has been, as President Duarte says, enough to prevent failure but not enough to win the war and resolve the economic problems.

El Salvador represents a historic test for the American people who are accustomed to short-term accomplishments and immediate gratification. The test is about "lessons learned" in Vietnam and elsewhere, not in the sense of a direct country analogy, but rather, in the greater maturity and persistence in our conduct of foreign relations. In El Salvador we are only 8 years into what could prove to be a 12- to 14-year low intensity conflict unless, as the Salvadoran government seeks and we support, there are successful negotiations and changes that allow a peaceful and earlier solution. Even should peace be achieved earlier, continued United States assistance, at a significant but diminishing level, will still be required to assure consolidation of self-sustaining democracy and economic growth. United States strategic and security interests do not permit us to ignore the political and military challenge posed by guerrilla wars like the one being waged in El Salvador.

While the history and comments presented in this book deal primarily with events in El Salvador, the questions of the proper organization of the American government and the importance of American persistence in coping with low-

intensity conflicts are mentioned by several of the principals interviewed. As one who is charged with the conduct of our relations with El Salvador and the management of all United States programs and personnel in El Salvador, a few comments about certain current developments within the American foreign relations framework may be useful.

Leaders and governments in Central America have been lobbied and presented foreign policy positions by former American Presidents, presidential candidates, both political extremes of Congress, and congressional staffers that are at variance or contradictory to that enunciated by the President and the Secretary of State. Central American governments and leaders have been confused, frustrated and inclined to "play our system" to their own advantages (and, in the case of Nicaragua, adversely to United States security interests). Senator Vandenberg's dictum that foreign policy differences among Americans should cease at the water's edge has long been forgotten. Probably little will be done to reverse this trend, but I believe that one of the lessons to be learned from El Salvador and Central America is that the American Executive and congressional leadership must address how to minimize the problems in conducting foreign policy related to our system of separation of powers, checks and balances, and the treasured democratic debate and freedom of speech inherent in our political process.

The United States Government, largely because of Executive-congressional relations and a current lack of bipartisan consensus on Central America, is often inflexible and, in certain areas, incoherently organized to meet the demands of crises-ridden El Salvador which require quick responses to changing circumstances. A prime example of this has been our inability to win congressional support for Salvadoran efforts to reform the police and improve law enforcement to help public security forces increase their capacity to bring to justice human rights abusers, to combat urban terrorism, and to impede guerrilla creation and infiltration of urban support/front groups—this, despite the FMLN's murder of American citizens and Embassy employees.

The danger with protracted conflict is that after a while Washington may come to treat El Salvador as an "in-box" issue, bureaucratizing responses to the El Salvadoran war because it is going on so long. It is too easy to forget that people are fighting and dying every day. Because it is not the type of global conflict that fully engages the American people's national consciousness, prolonged low intensity conflict is difficult for our government. Complacency, reflected in a lack of urgency or policy relativism or resource allocation, could become our Achilles heel. Lack of adequate resources becomes the tangible manifestation of the problem.

There is also a need for the Executive and the American public to work with congressional leadership to reduce the growing tendency of Congress to try to micromanage United States assistance programs. This penchant too often results in lessened efficiency, effectiveness, and timeliness of our actions. I believe that the Agency for International Development (AID) is the best development institution in the world—superior to international development institutions and other countries' *foreign development aid agencies—but ever expanding* congressional restrictions, earmarking, and guidance have imposed enormous bureaucratic demands on AID programming, project paper preparations, project implementation, and evaluations and have led to interruptions and problems in smooth project execution.

Congress' control of the purse strings and the Senate's constitutional role of advice and consent on the President's key appointments and agreements with foreign governments are welcome and necessary, but the level of direct oversight by Congress has, it seems to me, become excessive. Congressional impositions on such matters as to what kinds of military equipment should be used and how to employ such equipment, long delaying "holds" by a few Congressmen on Executive-desired changes in already congressionally approved programs, and congressional conditions on assistance that overly limit management and negotiating flexibility are disruptive to effectively conducting our foreign policy. Much of this derives from Congressmen's misuse of and overreliance on an ever-

expanding number of staffers. Congressional oversight is essential and wanted, but in a crisis situation such as Central America, the Executive must be able to respond and implement rapidly and must possess sufficient flexibility for efficient and effective program implementation.

Also, if the Department of State and embassies are to perform well their function of management of the United States programs abroad, explain policies, and persuade host country leaders and sectors to back United States efforts, understand what is going on, keep Washington informed, and implement successfully our programs and policies, the Department of State must be properly and adequately staffed. All administrations of the United States since our emergence as a superpower after World War II have failed to adequately educate the American people and Congress to the fact that diplomacy and foreign assistance are just as vital a part of our national security as are our Defense Department and armed forces. This is particularly true in coping successfully with subversive and Communist-inspired revolutionary movements. Compared to the budget for our own armed forces, foreign economic and security assistance and the cost of our diplomatic establishments are small. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We need to give greater priority to assuring adequate resources and personnel in these areas.

The strategic importance of El Salvador and Central America to our country, the Marxist-Leninist led insurgency in El Salvador, the economic crisis, the need to consolidate a fragile democracy and to continue progress in human rights, the natural disasters of the massive October 1986 earthquake and two years of drought, the interventionist actions of the Nicaraguans and Cubans and Soviets, the lack of sufficient bipartisan consensus in the Congress on our Central American policy (as opposed to our policy on El Salvador), and the consequent difficulty of our government to speak with one voice on our Central American policy—all these factors—combine to make complex the conduct of our policies and programs in support of Salvadoran democracy. The final results of the struggle are not yet determined. Salvadoran President José



Napoleón Duarte says that the Cuban-Nicaraguan backed guerrillas are engaged in prolonged people's war, that his government is waging a prolonged strategy for peace and constitutional democracy, and that what is required from the United States is a prolonged commitment to support democratic leaders and their armed forces.

If the American people, through our Congress, maintain such a commitment, I am confident that a tremendous foreign policy success will be achieved in Central America. We will have denied to the Marxist-Leninists a foothold on the American landmass and have helped democratic forces to consolidate constitutional democracies that can provide a better way of life for their peoples. This book describes how that success is coming about.

What Salvadorans have achieved in their nation during the past eight years is remarkable in institutionalizing democracy, in better observing human rights, in improving the military and turning the tide against the Marxist-Leninist Farabundo Martí Liberation Movement (FMLN), and in halting the economic decline, while laying the basis for long-term growth. El Salvador has become an example of a country successfully struggling through the difficult transition from a legacy of military dictatorship to democratic government while under attack by a foreign-backed insurgency. As such it stands in stark contrast to neighboring Nicaragua where Sandinistas are attempting to consolidate a Marxist-Leninist regime.

El Salvador has been and will continue to be a constant reminder of the Sandinistas' failure to live up to their promise in 1979 to the Organization of American States to carry out immediately democratic elections. El Salvador's own honest elections, freedom of assembly and expression, and its active opposition political parties all show contrast with the lack of similar democratic rights and practices in Nicaragua. The complete compliance of El Salvador with the Esquipulas II treaty, in comparison with the Sandinistas' begrudgingly taken cosmetic measures, is another way in which President Duarte has pressured the Sandinistas to move toward democracy and peace.

After you have read the ideas and thoughts of the principals (of all persuasions) in this dynamic history, I am confident that you will concur that the United States is doing the job right in El Salvador. There are not massive numbers of Americans. We are allied with truly democratic leaders and on the correct side of struggle. Our goals and objectives are consistent with our values, traditions, and history. And, success here is essential to our national security. In this region we are on the right track, and we must learn further from this experience in order to live securely and successfully in a world that most likely will be plagued by low-intensity conflicts for some years to come.

The Cuban/Sandinista supported guerrillas' commitment to a prolonged people's war strategy in El Salvador continues unabated. I am hopeful that the American people and the American Congress will continue to provide the backing and resources to pursue the attainment of an acceptable and lasting peace in the region and to assure pluralist, democratic political systems based on the consent of the governed and the rule of law. The United States' principal objective is to help Salvadorans in their quest to achieve peace and to consolidate constitutional democracy. This is a long and difficult process. I suggest that only after continued progress through at least three more Salvadoran presidential elections and the diminishing of the guerrilla war over the next couple of years will we be able to talk about having achieved an institutionalized, self-sustaining democratic system.

The United States and its Salvadoran allies are on the verge of a tremendous success for democracy and for our nation's foreign policy—if we stay the course.

Here in El Salvador there are lessons to be learned. Max Manwaring and Court Prisk have done a superb job of recording the thoughts and opinions of the key actors in the Salvadoran struggle. They provide to the readers the views of Salvadoran civilian officials and civilian opposition leaders, of Salvadoran military officers and guerrilla commanders, and of American civilian and military officers who have been and continue to be deeply involved in the ongoing struggle. Their candid, engaging, and extremely cogent book provides information,

analyzes varied opinions, and records for us the valuable lessons being learned. Good reading.

EDWIN G. CORR  
UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR  
TO EL SALVADOR

*San Salvador, El Salvador*  
*8 December 1987*

## *Acknowledgments*

THIS WORK WAS FIRST PROPOSED in the Fall of 1986 by General John R. Galvin who was then Commander-in-Chief of the United States Southern Command. The idea was to develop the general lessons learned from the conflict in El Salvador as part of a continuing effort to revitalize strategic thinking as it pertains to "small wars." Additionally, the United States Ambassador to El Salvador, Edwin G. Corr, saw the need for a contemporary history of the conflict. Thus, this book is a synthesis of these two concepts.

When General Galvin left Panama to become Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, the project continued with the active support and encouragement of Ambassador Corr and the current Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Command, General Fred F. Woerner. Others who were key players in one capacity or another include Colonel John A. Cope, Jr., Colonel Robert M. Herrick, Colonel George Meynes, Colonel Rod Pascall, Colonel Edgar L. Smith III, Dr. Gabriel Marcella, Lieutenant Colonel John T. Fishel, and Major James K. Waters.

Mrs. Helen Hurley and Lieutenant Colonel Martin Andresen of the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, are responsible for getting us off to a proper start in the oral history business. Moreover, the BDM Corporation of McLean, Virginia, under contract with the Southern Command's Small Wars Operational Research Division (SWORD), supported the search of available literature and the interviewing of most of the contributors. This effort resulted in over 2,000 pages in 40 volumes and provided the necessary data base for the book. The interviews have been provided to SWORD and to the Military History Institute to aid both practitioners and researchers in their labors relating to the war in El Salvador.

A volume such as this is built on the work of many others. The bulk of the credit goes to the book contributors themselves. However, a special word of acknowledgment must go to Allison E. Letzer and Wendy R. Christensen for their special expertise and talents. Allison went way beyond the call of duty in doing the translations and transcriptions. Wendy's mastery and drudgery at the word processor—especially in the final hectic days before the “drop dead date”—were indispensable and much appreciated. Finally, Bob Parrish did some very heavy editing on his own time, and Steve Winter did the format and made the arrangements which led to a very fruitful interview with Dr. Guillermo Ungo.

We alone, of course, are responsible for any errors and omissions.

MAX G. MANWARING  
COURT PRISK

*Panama City, R.P.*  
*15 December 1987*

## *Introduction*

IN THE LATE 1970s, CHRONIC political, economic, and social tensions began to generate another in a relatively long list of crises in El Salvador. During that time, General Carlos Humberto Romero was brought to power by those who thought that he would be able to establish a regime strong enough to control the various forces agitating for change. But by 1979 the situation was beyond control by repression.

The catalyst that ignited the continuing violence in El Salvador over the past several years was the military coup of 15 October 1979 in which Romero was ousted as the last protector of the interests of the oligarchy. After that, the history of the country breaks down into four clearly defined periods. The period after the coup was one of almost complete disarray. None of the three major actors in the conflict—the military, the insurgents, and the United States—was ready for the aftermath of 50 years of authoritarian government. Then, from the end of 1981 to the end of 1984, the Salvadoran revolutionaries seemed to unify and appeared to be well on their way to a military victory and the assumption of political power in their own right. Clearly, the insurgents were ascendant. By the end of 1984, however, the armed forces had taken the best the insurgents could give and were beginning to regain control of the political-military situation. Perhaps it is still too early to tell, but the period 1985-1986 appears to us to be the beginning of the end of the idea that revolution comes only from the "barrel of a gun." Finally, the period from the end of 1986 to the present has been a time in which nothing really decisive seems to have taken place. The revolutionaries have been deprived of their military victory, yet the U.S.-backed government forces have not won either. There is a stalemate.

Lessons that might be learned from the Salvadoran conflict cannot be classified as neatly as events. But, they provide cogent illustrations of many universal aspects of contemporary war. As an example, there is usually an asymmetry of power in contemporary conflicts. An actor wishing to change or overthrow a prevailing situation or regime cannot directly challenge the superior force of a government and its international supporters. This requires the application of what Sun Tzu calls indirect force. Indirect force is applied or conducted through the use of moral as well as military power. The use of this type of power implies the addition of a number of political-psychological dimensions to the conflict that heretofore have not been given much weight. If carefully done, the use of "moral" influences can undermine the legitimacy and the position of another actor by breaking the bonds which unite a people, its political leadership, and its protective security organizations. And, when the usual attrition techniques fail to produce victory over insurgents who are using these methods, military and civilian leaders complain bitterly that the war has been won "militarily" but lost "politically"—as if these two elements were not totally interdependent.

Moreover, by transforming the emphasis of war from the level of military violence to the level of a struggle for legitimacy, an actor can strive for total objectives—e.g., the overthrow of a government—instead of simply attempting to obtain leverage and influence for "limited" objectives in the traditional sense. Thus, the concept of indirect force permits actors to engage in covert and prolonged wars—striking at an adversary's right to govern—while appearing to pursue moral and even peaceful intentions. This can be the case before a conflict is recognized to have begun, during a conflict, or after it has been considered terminated. In these terms, war is not an extension of politics, politics is an extension of war. As long as opposition exists vis-a-vis some situation in the international security system, there is conflict—very political, multi-dimensional, and total.

In this milieu of a total conflict, the continuing struggle in El Salvador appears to be an excellent example of achieving

stalemate by virtue of not dealing adequately with problems at the strategic level, even though actions at the tactical level might have been generally successful.

As such, the Salvadoran case is interesting and instructive. Nevertheless, a word or two of caution is in order. First, "lessons learned" may not be in consonance with the popular wisdom and therefore not assimilated into policy and budgets. It is not just a matter of learning from past errors or successes. The question is, "Are we willing to deal with a given issue?" Second, "lessons learned" can be erroneous if too literally applied to a seemingly similar situation.

The only honest way to face the first problem is to examine personal conscience, ethics, and priorities. A quick look into history can provide an illustration and solution to the second problem: in the year 1415, a superior French force was defeated at Agincourt by the English under King Henry V, as a result of adapting to erroneous lessons learned.

Sixty years earlier, in 1346, the English under King Edward III severely defeated the forces of Philip VI of France at Crecy. Edward chose a defensive position close to the center of a narrow valley and on the down slope of a small hill. There, he placed his men-at-arms and knights. He then located his long-bow archers as legs of a vee on each flank of the valley. French men-at-arms, followed by mounted knights and cross-bowmen, attacked with superior numbers in successive waves through the valley floor. But, the French knights, following the men-at-arms, could never break through the mass in the middle or take advantage of the mobility of their horses. Instead, they fell to a rain of arrows from the English long bow. There were many lessons for the French to learn: Don't attack piecemeal; don't fight long bows with cross bows; don't attack in a defile which limits maneuver room. But, one lesson remembered by the French, who left 1,500 knights among the thousands of dead in the valley of Crecy, was that the English men-at-arms and the English knights were dismounted on the front slope of the hill.

At Agincourt a vastly superior French force of approximately 20,000, with 12,000 men-at-arms, blocked Henry V's return to England. This time, the French chose the



site. It was a narrow front along a road with forest on both sides. The English took up positions on a small hill in the center of the defile—upon and in front of which Henry placed his dismounted knights and men-at-arms. And, again, the long-bow archers were positioned in a vee radiating out from the center hill along the edge of the forest. Impatiently, the French attacked the archers along the wooded flanks with light cavalry charge while the main body charged the middle position. Only this time, the French demonstrated they had learned their lesson. The men-at-arms and the knights—wave after wave—attacked dismounted. The French lost 10,000 of their 20,000-man force. Henry sailed home with almost all of his army, and another victory.

Clearly, the French had studied the battle of Crecy well. The minutia were completely understood. But, there apparently had been no analysis, no appreciation of the entire situation, and—consequently—no valid lessons learned.

There are also definite lessons to be learned from the individuals who have been involved in the struggle in El Salvador. What we endeavor to provide here is a more complete picture which provides perspective and assists understanding. In drawing conclusions about the experiences noted herein, readers and planners must strive to note the archers, the general capabilities of the foe, the valley, and the whole strategic scene and not focus only on the obvious—the dismounted knights on the front slope of the hill.

Having made the above cautions, the following oral history of the conflict in El Salvador can, conveniently, be considered as an interesting but specific and unique situation. However, it seems to us that there is much more to it than that. Our experience and observation indicate strongly that much of what is said by those who have dealt with that war at the strategic and operational levels can be applied analytically at a proper level of abstraction to the problems of contemporary “people’s wars” wherever they might be found. Despite other very real challenges, insurrection is and will be the most likely threat to Western security over the next generation.

# *Chronology*

## *The Conflict in El Salvador, 1979-1987*

IN DISARRAY: 15 OCTOBER 1979 TO OCTOBER 1981

### **1979**

- 15 October President Carlos Humberto Romero is deposed in a coup led by Colonel Adolfo Arnoldo Majano and Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez.
- 16 October Civil-military junta announces state of seige; suspends constitutional guarantees for 30 days; announces ambitious social and economic reform program; and calls for free elections.
- 22 October Junta names 12-member cabinet that represents all opposition to the Romero government—including Communists.

### **1980**

- 5 January Junta dissolves. New Christian Democratic Party-military junta formed.
- 6 March Junta announces plans to expropriate all properties over 500 hectares and form cooperatives to be owned by the families working them.
- 23 March Archbishop Arnulfo Romero assassinated.
- 11 October FDR/FMLN organized from the May 1980 union of five insurgent groups—as a result of pressure by Fidel Castro.
- October-November 600 tons of weapons provided to guerrillas. Some traced back to Vietnam.

- 4 December Bodies of four American women—three nuns and one lay worker—are found in shallow grave along highway from airport to San Salvador.
- 5 December U.S. suspends military and economic aid to El Salvador.
- 15 December "Radio Liberacion" starts broadcasting to El Salvador from Nicaragua, inciting people to organize a general insurgency against the Salvadoran government.
- 17 December U.S. restores economic aid to El Salvador.

**1981**

- 4 January Two American labor leaders and head of Salvadoran Institute of Agrarian Reform are assassinated at Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador.
- 10 January Insurgent forces begin "final" offensive.
- 14 January U.S. resumes military aid to El Salvador.
- 5 March Junta announces establishment of electoral commission to prepare for legislative elections to be held in 1982.
- 4 August Government turns over the first land titles to be issued under the Agrarian Reform Program.
- August France and Mexico give diplomatic recognition to FDR/FMLN.

**INSURGENT ASCENDANCE FROM THE END OF 1981 TO THE END OF 1984**

- December Insurgent forces begin the "general" offensive—a rationalization of the "final" offensive.

**1982**

- 28 January Campaign to elect a Constitutional Assembly opens.
- 28 March Elections held for Constituent Assembly.

- 22 April Arena party leader Roberto D'Aubuisson elected president of the Constituent Assembly.
- 29 April Constituent Assembly names Dr. Alvaro Magaña as president of a provisional government to replace junta.
- 1982-1983 Insurgent forces continue general offensive and specific efforts to disrupt electoral and constitutional processes.

**1983**

- U.S. begins to train Salvadoran battalions and officer candidates in the U.S. and Honduras.
- 8 September Constituent Assembly approves law permitting peasant labor organizations.
- 11 December Vice-President George Bush visits El Salvador. Makes U.S. position clear regarding the necessity to secure human rights.
- 16 December Constituent Assembly unanimously approves final version of new constitution.
- 17 December Special unit created to investigate and eliminate death squads.
- 21 December Constituent Assembly becomes national legislature.
- 31 December Insurgent forces stage major attack and take over Fourth Brigade Headquarters at El Paraíso.

**1984**

- 25 March Presidential elections. No candidate wins majority. Run-off election required.
- 6 May Run-off election held. PDC Candidate José Napoleón Duarte wins with 53.59 percent of the vote.
- 24 May Five former National Guardsmen are convicted of the December 1980 murder of the four American church women.
- 1 June José Napoleón Duarte inaugurated as first freely elected president in 52 years.

- Mid-1984      Government forces begin to regain the military initiative.
- 8 October     President Duarte at U.N. General Assembly calls for dialogue with armed opposition.
- 15 October    Meetings between government and FMLN take place at La Palma.
- 30 November   Additional government-FMLN meetings at Ayagualo.
- 1 December    Insurgent forces ambush government troops in El Salto in north-eastern La Paz Department.

#### THE WAR CHANGES DIRECTION FROM THE END OF 1984 TO THE END OF 1986

##### 1985

- 31 March      National Legislative Assembly and municipal elections held. PDC takes a majority of seats in the National Assembly and 58 percent of municipal councils.
- Early 1985    Insurgent forces begin to change tactics from relatively large-scale, conventional-type attacks to smaller unit actions. At the same time, more economic and civil population targets come under attack.
- 19 June       Persons dressed as Salvadoran military personnel attack several night clubs in San Salvador's Zona Rosa, killing 13 unarmed people in cold blood—including 4 off-duty U.S. Marines.
- 10 September   Inés Guadalupe Duarte Duran, oldest daughter of President Duarte, and her secretary, kidnapped.
- 10 October     Insurgent forces generate a major attack on the Army's Basic Training Center at La Unión.
- 24 October     Inés Guadalupe Duarte Duran, her secretary, and mayors and other municipal officials kidnapped earlier are released in exchange for over 100 insurgent prisoners.

November      A National Reconstruction Plan (Unidos Para Reconstruir) unveiled.

#### STALEMATE: 1986 TO THE PRESENT

##### 1986

8 January      Government forces initiate long-term "Operation Phoenix" with the intention of driving insurgents from strongholds on the Guazapa Volcano in Cuscatlan Department. Lasts until mid-1987.

26 February    Gunmen convicted of the 1981 Sheraton murders given maximum 30-year prison sentences.

1 June          Insurgents accept President Duarte's proposal for resumption of peace talks.

10 October      Major earthquake in San Salvador. More damage done in seven seconds than through insurgent actions over past seven years.

##### 1987

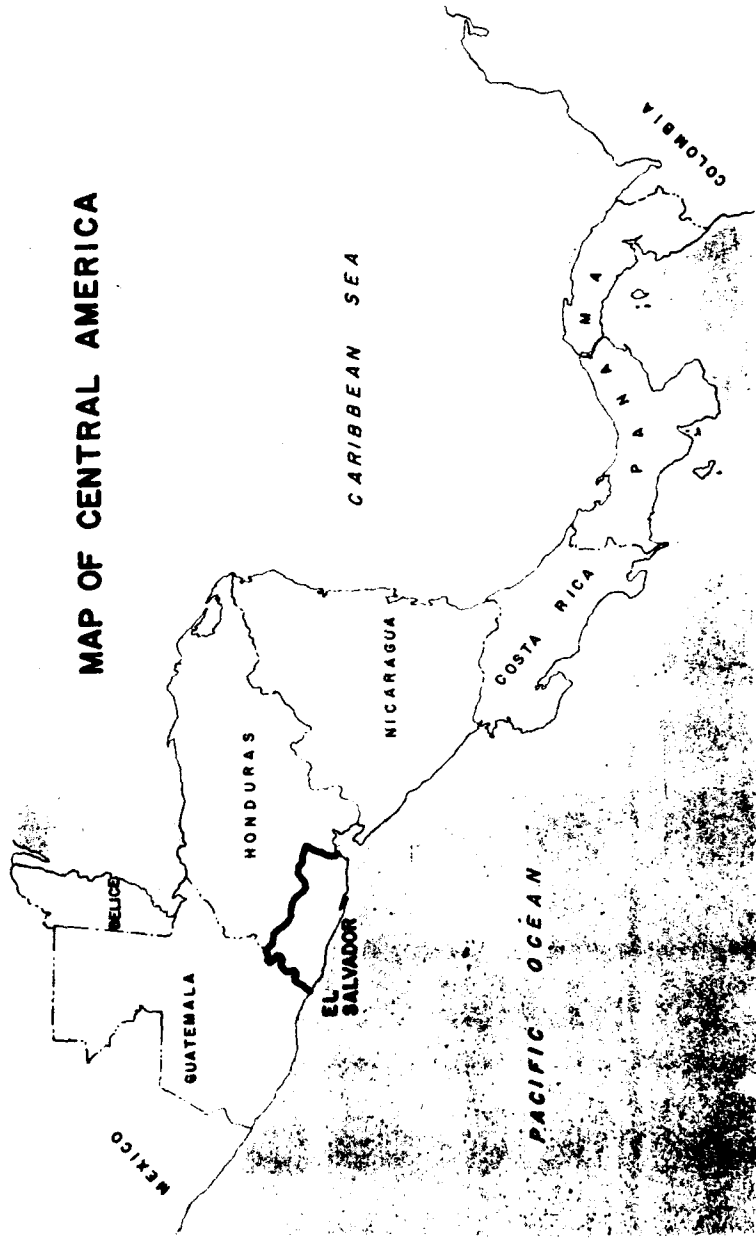
21 January      Insurgent forces attack El Paraíso again. This is the first major attack since the effort at La Unión in October 1985.

20 May          Government forces initiate "Operation Monterosa" with intention of disrupting as many insurgent operations as possible. Lasts through August.

Fall             Central American Peace Plan proposed by President Arias of Costa Rica. Received great acclaim and Arias is given the Nobel Peace Prize.

6 November     President Duarte announces a unilateral ceasefire and general amnesty in El Salvador, citing his desire for all critics of the government to return to the country and participate openly in a free and nonviolent electoral process.

7 November     Insurgent forces initiate the most destructive economic sabotage operation since the beginning of the war.



DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY INTER-AMERICAN GEODETIC SURVEY, PANAMA

*El Salvador at War*



*Part I*

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*El Salvador  
in Context*



## *Prone to Violence*

THE EDITORS—To counter a revolutionary strategy aimed at a Third World social order, the first priority is to understand it. An appreciation for the causes of a specific environment and the primary center of gravity form the basic foundation for that understanding. In this context, the struggle in El Salvador needs to be understood as it appeared to the three primary players—the insurgents, the Salvadoran government, and the United States.

The root causes lay deep within the history of Latin America, and for the insurgents, the "revolution" had its root causes in social injustice and had been going on for at least a decade prior to October 1979. They saw it as a long-term violent struggle which must totally displace the existing order. Likewise the new political elites, brought to power by a coup, wanted to use the existing governmental structure to implement reforms and saw the need for a "revolution" which created—again over a long term—a more representative governance, one capable of correcting the social and economic injustices. The United States, as the third major actor, saw the conflict as a follow-on to the regionally unsettling, anti-U.S. takeover in Nicaragua. The United States wanted to calm the situation, sought a return to normalcy, but had no plan or long-term objectives.

## ***No Strong Basis for Democracy***

**General John R. Galvin**—The root causes go back 400 years. First of all, there was never any franchise for the indigenous people in Central America and indeed in most of Latin America. While every country is different and Latin America is not a homogeneous unit or organization, the so-called revolutions of Latin America were the revolutions of the Spanish elite to free themselves from Spain, in order that they could do whatever they wanted to do in running the governments. The neglect for the indigenous person is obvious in the fact that the indigenous peoples, even today, are pushed up into the mountains, into the less productive areas, and have very little to say about what goes on in the countries. So, the revolution, in effect, never came. The gnawing background that is there is the elitism. Really, I believe there is a great deal to what the historians say about the old civilizations, such as the Toltecs, the Aztecs, the Incas. They were more collective civilizations. True, the priests were an elite. But, there was greater involvement of the masses at that time than there is now. The Spanish Conquistador outlook is still reflected in the elitism that you see in many of these countries. There was not the same desire to bring the country itself ahead. There was more of a "what's in it for me" attitude in a lot of these people. I realize that's a strong accusation, but it is one that I think is supported by history. Now, in addition to that, you had governmental infrastructures which were extremely weak. They did not extend out into the provinces. They were basically concerned with agriculture and industry, such as it was—mining, and so forth—in the countries. So, a combination of lack of franchise for indigenous peoples and extremely weak infrastructures gave a comparatively greater strength to the church and the military and those allied with the administrations, one after the other, in those countries. These conditions did not provide a kind of strong foundation for democracy. These weaknesses remain in

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

the background. Now, it is the move of the disenfranchised people and the reaction to that by the elites that has a lot to do with the problems in Central America.

## ***A History of Minority Governments***

**Guillermo M. Ungo**—The struggle for democracy in El Salvador has a long history. Its fundamental causes are internal, but since the conflict's beginnings, its course has also been affected by a powerful external force, the government of the United States.

The oligarchic-military governments of El Salvador have long kept in place unjust institutions and policies that have excluded the majority of the people from real participation in the decision-making processes that affect their social, economic, and political life. Democracy has become a cruel and painful deceit to Salvadorans; its practice is considered dangerous and subversive. Any statement favoring social change provokes violent retribution as a matter of course. The social doctrine of the Roman Catholic church and the other churches, the exercise of trade-union rights and of freedom of thought, and criticism of the government are perceived to serve international communism.

The consequences of this way of thinking are clear. Church leaders are persecuted, unions are destroyed, and opposition newspaper offices and radio stations are dynamited. More than 40,000 Salvadorans have been murdered since 1980, including reporters, teachers, students, professionals, political leaders, an archbishop, and priests, in addition to thousands of workers and peasants. Thus the practice of democracy in El Salvador has a history written in blood.

Making a mockery of Abraham Lincoln's ideals, El Salvador's rulers have created governments of the minority and

(Political leader of the FPL) Guillermo M. Ungo, "The People's Struggle," *Foreign Policy* 52, (Fall 1983), p. 51-52. Copyright 1983 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Reprinted by permission of *Foreign Policy*.

for the minority whose survival has depended on institutionalized violence, on closing the channels of democratic participation, and on ever-increasing violations of human rights. Over the years, the dispossessed majority and the political, social, and religious leaders have faced a dilemma: To fight back and risk death in resistance or to submit and risk death from hunger, poverty, or political repression. It is not possible in El Salvador to aspire peacefully to human rights and political freedoms; their pursuit is a reckless venture. This is the true cause of the present war.

### ***Live with the System or Become Part of the Fertilizer Program***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—The Salvadoran system (prior to the coup) was not designed to solve the problems of the *campesino* dating back 50 years, or even longer if you go back before the Matanza. It was designed to keep the lid on, and if the *campesino* didn't like it, he had a couple of options: You could emigrate or you could become part of the fertilizer program. There wasn't any mechanism for grievances that worked. You were at the mercy of the landowner and the military in cahoots.

### ***The Political Spectrum***

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—I would say you had in the political structure, first, the organized parties. You had, over on the extreme left, the Communist party and its more radical offshoots. A good reason why the guerrilla organizations developed in the first place was that the Communist party for a long time hewed to the Moscow line of a broad political front

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.



DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY, INTER-AMERICAN GEODETIC SURVEY, PANAMA

but no armed action. So some of the original guerrilla groups split off because they believed in armed action. You had them joined by some of the church reformers in the late sixties and seventies, who became more and more politically radicalized and as a result found it easier and more compatible to join the political wing of the armed resistance. Moving closer to the center, you had the Social Democrats and the left of the Social Democrats. Some of them, along with the left of the Christian Democrats, joined the guerrilla organizations in 1979 at a time of major upheaval when it didn't look like the political situation would improve, and they felt sort of trapped out there. Some of them, I understand, now want to come back in out of the cold.

Among the political front of the guerrillas, there were some people who were genuinely Social Democrats and some people who were pretty much radical Communists in one guise or another. Further over you have the broad range of Christian Democrats, some of whom are conservative and some of whom are fairly liberal but occupying a center and left of center position. Right center was the PCN, Partido de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation party). The old party of the aristocracy, which was trying to find a way to reform its own image, and its right-wing offshoot ARENA (National Republican Alliance). And to the right of ARENA you had people who were basically only semipolitical managers of death squad activities, some of it for political reasons, some it for economic and commercial reasons, some of it just to try to control labor, to keep the *campesinos* under their thumb, and to maintain some tranquility in their village or whatever it was. You had a strong attraction in the rural population, interestingly enough, for authoritarianism of the Right because it was traditional, because they knew nothing else. You had, of course, the spectrum to the left of the Christian Democratic party flirting with the guerrillas from time to time.

The major *campesino* organizations, which had been radicalized by the political processes leading up to the '79 overthrow of Romero, the Junta, and all the things that came out of it, were influenced by the AFL-CIO on the one hand and the guerrilla organizations on the other, constantly competing

for their loyalty and support. That's the political spectrum. Within the social spectrum certainly there were the wealthy land-owning families, a large share of which had left, but the remnants of which were generally allied with ARENA, though not entirely. There were exceptions, people who would support other parties that in their total political views shared their deep resentment over the changes that had so affected them in their lifestyles. They weren't really affected all that much, but with their insecurity they were very difficult to deal with, and they ran the gamut in their power and influence. Then you had people who supported the PCN for traditional reasons, who were more open to democratic arguments and wanted to give themselves a new image, and you had people who were blatantly and openly ARENA, vocally anti-Communist. Fear of communism justified a lot of other things on their part. Not all of them were necessarily bad actors, but many of them were extreme nationalist Salvadorans who felt that the old system and the good old days were not yet over. They were definitely afraid of the Communists and the radicals or those who had been hurt one way or another by the violence of the country. You had to understand that the country itself was an extremely violent country. We looked back at world statistics in 1967, at one time, for civilian death rates, and we found that Salvador was right behind Aden in those days, and, of course, that was a period of war in Aden when the South Yemenis were trying to get rid of the British. It was true, it was a society heavily prone to violence. In large measure, alcohol, the machete, lack of education, frustration, all tended to produce a certain atmosphere of Saturday night massacre in the place. It was often violence simply for reasons of quarreling. Violence and alcohol were familiar ways for people to find respite from the other difficulties of life in the country. Violent methods of control were a part of the repressive atmosphere, and this was very much looked on as normal by people on the Right.

Aside from all these, you had within the country a well-educated class of individuals, a growing middle class, whose political views covered a spectrum. The Christian Democratic leadership in large measure had been influenced by American



education and values and by European education and values. They considered themselves intellectually respectable. You had, in the universities, strong centers of leftism particularly among the academics and the tradition of the free university of Latin America. And in a sense the major leadership of the guerrillas, in an intellectual sense, was drawn from the universities. They were a combination of university drop-outs—not that they were intellectually unable but, rather, people who were products of a radical university system—plus *campesinos* and peasants, pressed into the organization and pushed by them, plus priests and other individuals who grew out of the Catholic reform movement. That's basically the kind of spectrum you had to deal with in the country. Some technocrats, 500,000 internal refugees, and 500,000 external refugees.



## *Revolutionary Change and the Role of the United States*

THE EDITORS—In February 1972, after a decade of political struggle to work within the electoral process, the center-left National Opposition Union (UNO) was declared the winner of the national election by the Central Election Board of El Salvador. Napoleón Duarte was to be the first president and Guillermo Ungo the first vice-president in 40 years who were not the hand picked candidates of the landed oligarchy and the ruling military. Immediately following the board's announcement of UNO's victory a news blackout was imposed, to be lifted three days later when the Election Board announced new results. The military-backed National Coalition party (PCN) was declared the winner with Colonel Arturo Molina as president. Soon thereafter Duarte was implicated in an abortive coup attempt. He was forcibly taken from the Venezuelan Embassy, beaten, and put on a plane to Guatemala, from where he went into exile in Venezuela. This overt subversion of the election process created political turmoil. The legitimacy of the government was eroding, and the opposition political parties began to look for alternatives to the election process to bring about change.

Satisfied with maintaining the status quo, the oligarchy, fully in charge of the economy, looked to the military to maintain order and to protect their interests. With the oligarchy's continued seemingly total inflexibility to change, coupled with growing social unrest and political turmoil, the military government under Colonel Molina and his successor, General Carlos Humberto Romero, became more and more repressive.

As the military government became more repressive, the support for radical and insurgent solutions grew. The repression on one hand helped develop a cadre of leaders supporting insurgent solutions and on the other hand convinced moderates inside and outside of the government that dynamic change was necessary. Both insurgents and moderates began to talk of the needed changes as revolutionary.

### ***The People Are Sick and Tired of the System***

**General José Guillermo García**—During the transition between the presidencies of Colonel Molina and General Romero, I had been mentioned and involved indirectly with politics because of the former method of presidential succession; it was performed the same way as in other countries which I prefer not to mention. The person who is governing at the time decides who will succeed him as president. At that time, Eugenio (Vides Casanova), General Romero, and I were rumored to be possible presidential successors. I took the situation as calmly and normally as possible. However, when the time came to decide—after going through certain vicissitudes and the crude reality of what politics really are in this country—the nomination didn't depend exclusively on the President's decision but, rather, the decision of a sector. It's very long to explain. Our inexperience caused us to play sincerely

General José Guillermo García, Minister of Defense, El Salvador, 1979 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987.

but not politically. If we had been politically astute, we would all probably be ex-presidents today. But we are not politicians. I don't know if I should confess with happiness or sadness, but the fact is that we were nominated. The day before the President made public his decision of who his successor would be he called Eugenio (Vides Casanova) and me in. He told us he had arrived at the conclusion that his successor was going to be General Romero. He told me, "I would like to tell you that up until 15 days ago you were the finalist. You were going to be my successor but due to circumstances...." First of all, it is now when we find out that was true. We never accepted it as fact, and secondly, why did he tell us that? Simply because we were the finalists and he wanted us to know about it before it became public.... We stated our objections to the President (Colonel Molina), as friends, concerning the consequences of Romero's elections on the country. Romero was not very popular among a very large sector of the population for various reasons. But the President told us he had possible solutions by means of a decree, which at that time constituted a new way of agrarian reform. At that time, the agrarian reform had a lot of potential. The President, by the way, committed himself to his decision, and he wasn't going to turn back on it. So when the time came for General Romero to be nominated, the people protested and said, "Why him? He is not the right one." The President responded, "But I have the solution. The people will think that the agrarian reform is more important than the nomination of a candidate." Unfortunately, the decree disappeared. The situation was better off before the decree had even been mentioned. That is when you began to feel the social turmoil stirring. We had to go through a series of circumstances during that nomination period. As a military man, youth and inexperience bring honesty and sincerity. But not as a politician. The politician thinks about one thing and says something else, right? We were subject to a lot of pressure from different sectors, and you can imagine where they were coming from. They sat the three of us down once—General Romero, Eugenio Vides Casanova, and myself—the same way they sit the accused on the benches. They asked us very delicate questions

of a political nature, such as, "What is your opinion about the future of El Salvador?" I was the first one to speak. I said, "This country is going to experience some terrible problems if you don't do something to avoid it, because the people are sick and tired of the system. Certain changes must be made." They probably thought at the time I was a Communist. Eugenio, with all sincerity, and General Romero answered the question. You can imagine the results. They are evident. I do not regret having said what I said at the time, because only time uncovers the real truth about things. One cannot, at a given moment, decide what is good or bad. Time takes care of that. When Romero took over, I found out I was being sent back to the Military Academy, for the third time, as Deputy Director.

### ***A Breakdown of Political Consensus***

**Ambassador Edwin G. Corr**—You had a situation in the country where there was a relative amount of stability. There was agreement and a consensus on a political formula by which the country was managed. And you had had considerable progress and growth with the Central American market, and then all of a sudden there were other forces at work. There was a tremendous growth of population. There were changes in attitudes as people got transistor radios and began to look at the function of government differently, not just as an institution that provided a certain amount of internal order, but also one that had to provide certain goods and services to its citizenry. You also had the introduction of certain ideas of socialism, communism, and so forth that begin to work on the people. They begin to build up demands that the system was no longer capable of coping with. During the seventies, particularly following the Honduran/Salvadoran War, the political consensus that had existed began to break down. You began to see a greater amount of violence. The highest indices of kidnappings took place from '75 to '77. And one also notes that there began

Ambassador Edwin G. Corr, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1985 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 1 June 1987 and 24 September 1987.

to be a breakdown in the institutions of government. This is seen today as one examines such things as the controller general's office where they are still processing records from the early seventies—long before the '79 coup. Oh certainly, I could give you a number of examples that indicated that the institutions of government and the institutions within the society were no longer capable of meeting the demands that were being placed upon them by society and by the people. So you had a breakdown of political consensus, you had institutions that were beginning to fail, you had certain foreign ideologies that were also at work. You had a very large, landless rural population that only could work about four months out of the year, picking other people's crops or cutting their cane, picking coffee or cotton. The economic picture was a little bit more complex. Those people in the private sector here look back to the pre-1979 or pre-1978 period as a period of great prosperity. But I would only point out that the economy of El Salvador is so affected by external market prices that this is a little bit misleading. In 1978 the world price for coffee in real terms was more than three times what it is today. That kind of feeling that there was great prosperity, I think, was really caused more by external conditions than internal conditions, and eventually the economic machinery was breaking down too, primarily because of the failure of the Central American market. So all of these things came together, plus the events of Nicaragua, to bring about this coup that took place in 1979. It was truly a landmark happening.

### ***Time to Develop an Insurgent Cadre***

**Joaquín Villalobos**—I would say that the war as a military phenomenon of strategic importance indeed started in January

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 79-80. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission.

1981. But the revolutionary war as such has existed throughout the last 10 years. This distinction is important because prior to January, two important phenomena took place. On the one hand, there was the development of cadre who would be the future leaders of the revolutionary army, those who could conduct the insurrection and later guide a revolutionary army. On the other hand, there was the ability shown by this armed apparatus to also organize a powerful revolutionary mass movement which led to the military confrontation with the enemy.

### ***The People Will Decide Which Revolution***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—I acknowledged that the revolutionaries may have had good reason for taking up arms when there was no hope of economic reform, social justice or free election under the tyranny of the oligarchy allied with the armed forces.... The oligarchy controlling the economy, the armed forces running the government, and the United States protecting its interest in stability all worked to maintain the status quo in El Salvador....

When the armed forces threw me out of El Salvador, faith in the electoral process faded away. Many people concluded that the powers ruling El Salvador would never permit votes to defeat them. Change had to come by other means.

Both the guerrillas and the government are trying to win over the Salvadoran people and show the world who is right. The people will decide between Marxist revolution and democratic revolution.

Revolution is a process, not the act of taking power. The process of the revolution may begin with a change of government, but the revolution takes place only when there has

José Napoleón Duarte, *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 91, 211, 268-69, 274, 279, 281-82. (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G.P. Putnam's Sons.

been a transformation of the economy, the social patterns, the armed forces, the education, and the culture of a country. To carry out a revolution, the leadership must have an ideology and the political, economic and social strategies to apply it. These strategies affect all sectors of society and the international factors as well. They must respond to the conditions at any given moment.

There will be no common ground as long as the guerrillas believe violence is the only way they can gain power. There are opportunities for all political beliefs within the democratic system. The working class can organize to gain power within a democracy. But the guerrillas, who claim to represent the workers, seem more interested in attacking Salvadorans than trying to change the unjust structure of our society.

To become a democracy, the way we think about our differences must be democratic. When disagreements arise, the opponents must resort to public expression of opinion, to political organization around their cause, and to the courts when challenging interpretation of the law. A democracy cannot function without the intermediary structures such as a free press, political parties and a fair judicial system. Existing institutions may not be democratic, requiring a process that transforms them into instruments of democracy. This cannot be done overnight in El Salvador.

If the Christian Democrats demonstrate in El Salvador that a democratic system can bring about structural changes peacefully, then the polarized choice between domination by the rightist oligarchy and violent revolution by the Left will no longer be valid.

### ***The Role of the United States***

THE EDITORS—The historical violence in Central America, and in El Salvador particularly, gave the Carter administration ample reason to adopt a hard line insistence on human rights and "democratic" reform as conditions of U.S. assistance to countries in the region. The long-standing U.S. preoccupation with East-West



issues, sprinkled with an occasional attention to the South in the forms of military intervention or short lived economic assistance, led to a general lethargy and lack of understanding of the problems and the people of Central and South America.

While factions of the U.S. military and the U.S. State Department seemed to understand the overall strategic importance of the region, U.S. policy-makers as a whole tended to treat situations in the individual countries as isolated problems. The region was strategically important, but, like Cuba or the Panama Canal, the importance was in terms of East-West balance or context. Except in instances where U.S. businesses or blatant corruption impacted the U.S. image as a supporter of a particular regime, the policy-makers were seemingly content with preaching democracy and human rights, giving minimal amounts of military and economic aid, and otherwise adopting the policies of nonintervention in the affairs of their poor neighbors to the South.

The events in Nicaragua, especially after the U.S.-supported Sandinistas showed their preferences for the Marxist-Leninist ideology, forced the United States out of its lethargy. Previously held conditions for U.S. aid based on human rights gave way to "showing progress" in this area and in democratization.

The United States would have to be involved in order to fight the spread of communism and to bolster democratic regimes. And yet, the United States had not developed a better understanding of the problems nor a long-term plan for involvement. Everyone—insurgents, embattled regimes, and the now awakened Washington policy-makers—understood that the U.S. commitment would be critical to the eventual solution. The United States, however, was prepared to be anti-Communist—to return the situation to normalcy and stability—but lacked a program or the policies to be pro-democratic. There was no support net for democracy in the U.S.

arsenal, only the tools and programs to fight against something.

### ***The United States Preached Democracy and Human Rights But Did Little***

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**—Stepping back for a minute. I would say that El Salvador has been an extremely difficult problem for American policy. American officials have, in fact, been forced to become fairly deeply involved in supporting democratic political processes. My own conclusion is that the success of U.S. policy has been in direct proportion to our ability to support democratic processes in a constructive fashion. Let me illustrate this to be very certain that we understand what I mean. I do not mean support for democratic processes in an abstract, uninvolved, or purely rhetorical fashion. I don't think that works. The best example of that in El Salvador is what happened in the period between 1977, when the first human rights reports were published in January 1977, and the collapse of the first civil-military junta of October 1979, a collapse which took place between December of '79 and January '80. In that period, basically the Americans, the American government, the State Department, the administration, preached democracy and human rights and did little to advance them in practice. The Salvadorans clearly have to take their share of the blame. They rejected military assistance out of nationalist pride after the publications of the first reports, but it is perfectly clear that they would have gotten precious little from us, in any case, and the Carter people were delighted to be able to say that by God they weren't giving any aid to those torturers in Salvador. But, beneath the rhetoric, the reality is there are a lot of Salvadorans, including those in the military and security services who were

*Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1977 to date, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.*

troubled by having a fouled up relationship with the United States, who asked formally, on more than one occasion and at least once in writing, for U.S. assistance in human rights matters, so as to be able to figure out what to do to improve the relationship. And as far as I know they never got any very effective answer from the Department of State. I am not sure, for example, that the original request was ever even answered.

In 1979 the fall of Somoza set off repercussions that were very deep for El Salvador. Some of these, of course, on the far left side led directly to the formation of the FMLN and the guerrilla tactic because they thought that it would be possible to reproduce, in El Salvador, the Nicaraguan tactic—from unity of the different fragmented groups on the far left to the launching of some sort of final offensive. That, in fact, is the origin of the guerrilla offensive of January 1981. But there are other impacts, as well. On the American side, the Carter administration was shocked out of its noninterventionist lethargy when Nicaragua went sour. And by going sour, I mean until the Somoza regime came to an end in a way that clearly put Communist-oriented elements in the driver's seat. The Carter people had tended to assume that what happened in Central America really wasn't all that much business of theirs, that they couldn't influence it all that much anyway, indeed, maybe that it was immoral for them to try to influence it too much, and so forth.

When the Nicaraguan *dénouement* took place, the first reaction was that the situation had changed in a fundamental fashion, that we had to get involved. I was told at the time, I do not remember on what basis, that President Carter reacted in part by saying that he wanted the United States to become more involved, to prevent a repetition of the Nicaraguan experience anywhere else, but that he didn't want us to be backing the wrong horse. And, to some extent our mission, the mission of the Assistant Secretary, Ambassador Vaky, in 1979 when I accompanied him to El Salvador, was a fact finding mission. One of whose purposes was to see what kind of horse Romero might prove to be. Our meetings with him were inconclusive. We did not find him particularly impressive, as a man and as the President. I at least remember going back to my quarters and

drawing up a list of the presidents that I have known in my life and discovered that I ranked President General Romero as approximately number 40 out of 40, at the bottom of the list. To the best of my knowledge, though I did miss a brief portion of a private meeting between Vaky and Romero, Vaky did not at any point suggest to Romero that he resign. Rather, what he did talk about was the need for some kind of dramatic political initiatives in order to keep the situation in El Salvador from deteriorating. Be that as it may, the Romero group was clearly not in very good control of the situation, and it was no great surprise, therefore, when they fell and were replaced by a new coalition in October 1979.

### ***We Haven't Decided What or How Important the Problem is to the U.S.***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—I moved from a command in NATO to USSOUTHCOM (US Southern Command) without passing GO, collecting \$200.00, or anything else. I will say that General Meyer, then Chief of Staff of the Army, recognized the need to have some kind of program. Having worked with him before we were pretty much on the same frequency. I understood his concerns, and I very quickly was able to refine my own. But from no one else in the government did I get any guidance. I think that's wrong. It was a critical period. Obviously U.S. interests were being challenged, yet the sensing in Washington of priorities and importance never changed, and that's wrong. And that, I think, is a big problem. The fact that I received no guidance from anyone except the Chief of Staff of the Army is indicative of Washington's view. It has taken a long time to turn it around, and, obviously, it's a matter of continuing national debate. We haven't yet decided as a nation, as a government, what the problem is or how important it is to the United States.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

### ***The Context of the War: Reconnaissance of the Valley***

THE EDITORS—For the insurgents violent revolution is a requirement of the Marxist-Leninist class struggle. They see it as a long-term, total effort to replace the existing order with the "vanguard of the proletariat"—which is the only leadership group capable of properly correcting long-standing economic, social, and political injustice. The insurgent's objective was to destroy the legitimacy and the leadership of the government. The military-civil elites who generated the 1979 coup saw the need for radical change and proposed a set of dynamic, evolutionary processes which would correct the existing problems and leave the general fabric of society intact. These changes could be achieved through a "democratic" process in which the long-repressed "people" could take a major role. The third actor in the struggle, the United States, tended to view the situation in El Salvador as an extension of the general East-West superpower confrontation and as a follow-on to the Sandanista takeover in Nicaragua. As such, the primary objective of the United States seemed to be to do what was necessary to return to "normalcy" so as to concentrate on the primary threat.

The context of the war in El Salvador, then, was twofold. In terms of time, it would be a long-term struggle for survival for both the revolutionaries and the government. As far as the United States was concerned, it was something to be resolved as quickly as possible, but with complaisance. In terms of effort, the conflict would be political and moral as much as military. Thus, it would be a total effort for both insurgent and incumbent. Only an outside superpower would have the luxury of thinking in "limited" terms.

The thrust of the revolutionary program centered around the redress of real as well as perceived grievances and deprivations. The government

counterinsurgency planners understood this and did not respond only to the dismounted "enemy" military forces. They centered their efforts around basic reforms and the establishment of the foundations of participatory democracy. Thus, legitimacy—the moral right to govern—was the center of all power and movement on which everything depended and the basic context of the conflict. In Clausewitzian terms, it was also the primary center of gravity.

*Part II*

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*In Disarray:  
15 October 1979  
to October 1981*



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## *Current Conflict and the Coup of 15 October*

THE EDITORS—While there are many antecedents to the war in El Salvador—not a few of which might be traced as far back as 1492—it was the military coup of 15 October 1979 that will go down in history as the event that started the current conflict. At that time, none of the principal actors was ready for the events brought on by the ouster of General Romero.

### *By 1979, the Situation Was Beyond Control by Repression*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—It has been said that ... in 1972, electoral fraud was perpetrated against the Christian Democrats and that it was [President] Duarte who won those elections. Nevertheless, Colonel Molina took power because it was thought that he would be able to establish a regime strong enough to control the various forces agitating for change. But, by 1979, the situation was beyond control by repression. Moreover, Salvadoran officers had seen what had happened to Somoza's National Guard at the hands of the Nicaraguan people, and they were afraid they might not be able to put out

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.



the fire of revolution in El Salvador. To save the armed forces, they would have to break their alliance with the oligarchy and realign with political forces that could win popular support.

For me this was an extraordinary experience because an army that for many years had been directly or indirectly instrumental in maintaining certain parties in power transformed itself into an army of a democratic country and began to understand its responsibilities. Practically speaking, it was the same officers that five years before had been participating indirectly to maintain the status quo, who overthrew General Romero and proclaimed the reforms of 1980. The fundamental reforms were agrarian reform, banking reform, and the reform of foreign commerce.

### *Prelude to the Coup*

**General José Guillermo García**—When the seeds of the 1979 movement began, I was not included among the group that was stirring up the movement, but I was called because I was, and



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**General  
José Guillermo García**

still am, a great friend of Colonel Jaime Gutiérrez. Through him, they began to tell me what the movement was all about. During a meeting, which was attended by the principal participants, along with delegates of different military corps, I stated as my position that I was in agreement with what was going on and I was going to participate. But I laid down certain conditions because I knew at once there were several fellow soldiers who saw this as an opportunity to benefit from the movement. I told them that this was not a situation that would be used for the personal gains of each one but, rather, the future of our country. That is to say, we

General José Guillermo García. Minister of Defense, El Salvador, 1979 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987.

began the movement with sincerity and good faith. We were leading it with such good faith, we hadn't even noticed who were the true leaders of the movement. Among them were those who had their principal offices in the university, UCA (Universidad Centroamericana), and part of the employment sector, who were very well informed and, of course, were the primary inducers of the movement. I don't want to say that there wasn't good faith on the part of the officers. I believe that the majority of us did go in good faith, each in his respective echelon.

When the movement was initiated, I stated firmly that I didn't want any responsibilities. I had already devoted 26 years to the service, and I had already planned on retiring after San Vicente. I didn't want anything. But the October 15 movement came along and the following day I was being asked to take over as Minister of Defense. I said no. I told both Majano and Jaime, jokingly, that instead of giving me the title of Defense Minister, why not give me the responsibility as Minister of Foreign Relations. That's nice, with a lot of decorations and trips. But, to give me the responsibility of Defense Minister during that time was not very generous on their part. Finally they said, "Well, you are betraying us; you have fooled us all along." How could I refuse? I said, "O.K., I'll go." That is how I came to the First Brigade and was able to learn what the movement was all about and who was really behind it. That is where the big battle started out. From the first moment, from the first Council of Ministers, I noticed at once what the situation was. It was the beginning of the subversion, which had always existed in the country. The principal objective was the destruction of the armed forces.

I knew the problem was serious, and my mission was to defend the armed institution in order to avoid its collapse. Before October 15, none of us wore a uniform on the streets, not because we were afraid they'd kill us, but because we were afraid they'd spit on us. Such was the degree of pressure that had been transferred over from the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Already they were saying, "We don't even want to see military men." We started out, on October 15 with zero public opinion.

We began to build up on it. That is where I began to exercise some of my influence in order to build public opinion in our favor rather than conducting a war.

You must remember that at that time we were all alone. Everybody was against us. Everything began because international opinion was being managed by representation of international Marxism or by leftists, and here their representatives had many connections and succeeded at first in making an erroneous image of the government which had been installed. They managed to create a superfluous image of the government that had been installed at the time. The leaders, Guillermo Ungo and Zamora, were at the peak. I saw the situation very clearly.

### ***The 15 October 1979 Coup: Unhinging the Oligarchy's Power***

**Fermán Cienfuegos**—Let's not forget that, after all, the coup of October 15, 1979, signified a relative unhinging of the oligarchy's power, in that it was a new situation with less than ideal conditions. For the oligarchy it was a matter of recovering government positions, which they hadn't really lost, but hadn't been able to handle either. The representatives of the oligarchy's corporate interests, finding themselves in a delicate, complex and dangerous political situation, had been unable to reconcile these with their long-range goals.

This situation caused shifts within the core of the oligarchy. Those with a more long-range political and economic approach had been pushed to the sidelines, in many far-reaching decisions, while those with a "do-it-now" approach and the

Fermán Cienfuegos, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) and a member of the general command of the FMLN. His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in the Mexican journal *Proceso* on 9 March 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 57. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

most bellicose tendencies had gained much ground. This sector of the oligarchy views the present situation as a process of recovering political power it nearly lost to the bourgeois-reformist sector of the oligarchy which imperialism had wanted to impose.

The Junta is definitely unable to govern. That it has ever governed is questionable. The Christian Democratic military regime has no popular support whatsoever, nor any national or international credibility. The continuous crisis of the regime, marked by constant desertions of its administrators and by an incapacity to implement even a small part of its programs, is now dramatized by total economic chaos, a chaos which, from many points of view, is irreversible.

Only one thing still holds up this government, and it is the same thing that props up all puppet regimes: imperialism's dollars and the political alliance of the most retrogressive sectors. The military's attempts to make a leader out of Duarte only add a touch of melodrama to a situation that is clearly untenable.

### ***The Leadership Was in Limbo***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—The political and military leadership of El Salvador was in limbo after the coup of '79 when General Romero was overthrown and Colonel García came to power. The military found it advisable to unite with the leader of the Christian Democratic movement. This coup was very significant in terms of measuring the seriousness and intent to effect changes. They went so far as to call upon Napoleón Duarte, whom they had robbed of his presidential election (1972), had exiled, and probably even tortured, to head the Civil-Military Junta. Whether this occurred for military institutional reasons or because of the personal desires of the participants to gain power and its spoils, this was one of the most significant events since the 1930s in Salvadoran history. It was probably a mix of motives.

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

This coup had been prompted, as many others, by a group of idealistic and frustrated junior officers, but in this instance they co-opted powerful elements of the senior officer corps because the senior officer corps, except for one or two individuals, probably were not willing participants. They had been drawn into it for various reasons, some good, and others not so good. The co-optation increased institutional support to the young turks, who, in the limbo of '79-'81, were trying to consolidate and lead toward a Constitutional Assembly and eventual elections.

The military was buffeted on both sides and internally. The far right was clearly opposed to their intentions because it was the Civil-Military Junta that initiated the momentous reforms in agriculture, land tenure, and banking, which were all to the elites' perceived detriment. They were opposed by the FDR and its militant arm, the FMLN, because they were co-opting the political and social rationale of the guerrilla movement and placing it within a potentially democratic context.\* They were *opposed internally by the leadership of the armed forces*, who saw a threat to their vested interests in continuing an alliance with the oligarchy that had existed for decades.

In spite of the apparent unity of purpose personified in the Civil-Military Junta, there was an extraordinary degree of suspicion between the military and the civilian government. This was obviously a marriage of convenience. At this point in Salvadoran history, Napoleón Duarte had no confidence in the military, for good reasons. The military looked upon him as an enemy of the military. The standard quote of the day was, "The only good military man is one hanging from a lamp post," attributed to Napoleón Duarte. Whether or not that was apocryphal, I don't know. But they certainly suspected him. There was a deliberate design to exclude him from the decisionmaking process of the military, which was very much still in control.

At that time the military had not joined the civilians who were opposed to the continuing rule of the famous 14 families (which many years ago expanded to a greatly increased number). They had, however, banded together for mutual

\*See pages 80-81 for insurgent organizations.

convenience, particularly in the light of the failure of earlier juntas and the withdrawal of different civilian segments from the earlier Civil-Military Junta.

So the military in turning to Napoleón Duarte were taking a giant step—a step that dramatized the seriousness of their intentions, since they were aligning themselves with their traditional internal enemy. In so doing they cut themselves off from their traditional internal ally, the oligarchy. Thus they were in a state of limbo—cut off from their traditional ally but far from being unified with their new ally.

### ***The United States Did Not Respond Effectively***

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**—What is interesting is that although the coalition contained not only military but also political representatives (like Ungo, who were later to associate with the guerrillas), the administration was still unable to get itself on track and accept the need to get involved and to really support the regime. We talked, launched a number of nice sounding phrases, but we really did not get involved. We did not have the flexibility to provide a significant increase of economic or security assistance rapidly. In fact, the very idea of providing security assistance was opposed with all possible force by the new human rights bureau in the department. Of course, in responding slowly the United States was no different from the rest of the Western world. Although appealed to by that Civil-Military Junta of '79 for help, the West did not react positively. Therefore, in effect, it fiddled while the most extreme elements on the far left took the initiative, provoked street demonstrations, and helped to bring down the '79 Junta. It is at that point that American policy began to change in a positive direction for the first time. Realizing that there was too much at stake here, the administration decided to back the emerging

Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1977 to date, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

Christian Democratic Military Coalition and even to back its social reform programs. And to do so even with nonlethal security assistance meant breaking through the cutoff of El Salvador from military aid. This, indeed, is one of the key elements in changing the situation in El Salvador.

THE EDITORS—After the ouster of General Romero, El Salvador became a polarized, fragmented society on the verge of anarchy. The total confusion of the situation was to last for more than a year. Some examples illustrate the “good” and the “bad” of the time.

### *No One in Control*

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—No one seemed to be in control, neither the Junta, the security forces nor the Leftists. The Army officers were fighting among themselves. . . . They had staged a coup, but they could not control the Army or the government. Nor did the government control them. [After] October, 1979 there was a power vacuum.

One would have thought the Army, internally divided and infiltrated, would have panicked. We had received none of the military aid requested, while the guerrillas were well armed with weapons which the Sandinista rebels no longer needed and passed on. . . . The only force holding back the Leftist revolution was the Army.

### *Agrarian Reform*

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—The biggest single problem stemming from the '79 coup was that the Junta had initiated banking, land, and commodity reform. They had viewed these

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present), *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 102, 115, 162. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

problems as being the keys. The problem with the land reform is that only about 10 percent of the landowners have ever been compensated. You have this festering sore because the landowners think they are going to come back one of these days to turn back history, as the Bourbons did coming back after Napoleon's reign, having learned nothing and forgotten nothing. We need to get them out of the equation. They need to sign that quit claim that says, "Yes, I've been compensated." It doesn't have to be in cash. The law says 60-40 bonds. The landowner should say I'm out of it. The land is gone, and I'm going to have to turn my interest, intelligence, and entrepreneurial fervor elsewhere. That takes care of the immediate problem of whom does the land belong to, and then come the various phases of land reform. Lots of people benefit. The banking reform had to be—there's not only land reform, but you also have to be able to make loans available for seed and fertilizer.

The land reform will come along, but if there's no backup—there are no small business loans, no extension services, they cannot market their products, and they can't get the agricultural services if you will—then the reformers haven't done all the things that land reformers are supposed to do that cost money.

## ***Human Rights Reform***

***President José Napoleón Duarte***—As a junta, we had no chance of reforming the military bureaucracy or making the lower levels responsive to our orders. Our decrees on controlling the abuses of authority were never even transmitted to the local commanders. Only Colonel Vides Casanova in the National Guard and Colonel Reynaldo López Nuila in the National Police made a personal effort to begin disciplining their men and weeding out the most abusive ones.

A few other commanders were ready for the changes, but the structure was not.

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## ***The 13-15 August 1980 General Strike***

**Juan Chacón**—In the first place, let me make it clear that this was not a general strike; we envision the general strike as accompanying the final battles for power. Rather, these actions were general work stoppages, like the one on March 17, which was the first to be carried out by the joint forces. The latest work stoppage of August 13-15 had as its goal, first, to demonstrate the regime's inability to solve the problems of our country; to expose it as a government totally isolated from the masses; and to reconfirm the people's support for the FDR as their legitimate representative. It was also aimed at breaking the blackout that imperialism has tried to impose on our struggle and transcending national boundaries to tell people about what was really happening and the power of the revolutionary forces.

But the principal objective of the work stoppage was to begin moving to a more advanced stage of popular struggle. How do we achieve these objectives? It's very clear. The enemy tried to hide the achievements of the work stoppage, boasting that it had been a failure. Ever since the general strike was first announced, the government had carried out a publicity campaign to keep people from joining it. They also positioned all their armed forces in the capital, which is the nerve center of the country. The Army and riot squads occupied streets, factories, public services, neighborhoods, etc., to force people to work and give an appearance of tranquility.

In spite of all this, the work stoppage was a tremendous success for the Salvadoran people. Without having to utilize all their potential, the people put the enemy on the defensive, as shown by this wasted military action of the Junta.

During the work stoppage, we gained more experience, there was greater organization of people by neighborhood, and

Juan Chacón, member of the executive committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) until his death in 1980. Interview by CIDAMO originally published in Mexico, 1980, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 45-46. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

mass participation was not limited to political actions, but also included actions with the militias and the people's army. Military encounters at the national level had results favorable to the revolutionary forces; these battles have been wearing down the enemy troops. For example, the FPL alone caused 810 enemy losses during the three days of the general strike while 31 revolutionary *compañeros* were killed. This does not include the actions of the other political-military organizations.

The regime attempted to conceal all these achievements from the eyes of the world, trying to present a facade of apparent "tranquility," which they did by going house to house and forcing many people to go to work. There were workplaces of 200 or more employees where only 10 to 25 showed up. They forced transportation workers to work, while members of the Junta strutted triumphantly through the streets. This didn't break people's morale but it did confuse some sectors of the population, who let themselves be influenced by the demagogic nonsense.

## ***Murder, Assassination, and Death Squads***

**Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial")**—One more indicator of the breakdown of the regime is the incredible degree of cynicism and sadism in the assassinations that they commit daily. They take an entire family from their home, and the next day the bodies are found strung up in the outskirts of town with their faces tied together, as if kissing each other. It is repulsive to have to talk about these things, but the world must know about them. In December, disfigured bodies began to appear with signs that read, "Merry Christmas, people. We are ridding you of terrorists."

Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"), primary leader of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), one of the organizations that make up the FMLN, until his death in 1983. Interview by Adolfo Gilly originally published in Mexico on 4 and 5 January 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 52-53. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



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## *Problems in the Junta and the Army*

THE EDITORS—After the coup of October 1979 the military sought to establish the Junta following the historic model of Latin American politics. This focused on sharing power with key power centers in the attempt to establish a unity of effort around the military's proclamation to institute reform objectives. Very quickly the military leadership found that the various groups were not interested in modifying what existed but were polarized around either maintaining essentially what had existed before or the implementation of more radical reforms. This first Junta could not establish a cohesive coalition nor was it able to control the violence from either of the opposing ends of the political spectrum. Without the ability to effectively establish its authority, the first Junta disintegrated and was replaced by a second Junta in January 1980. The second Junta, one of convenience between the military and the Christian Democratic party (PDC), brought together traditional political enemies. It was characterized by mutual distrust and the mutual goal of political and institutional survival against the common threat of the leftist insurgency. The willingness of the PDC to align itself with the armed forces created the milieu which promised meaningful change. The flexibility and capability of the military to adopt the coalition

requirements, to essentially deny its traditional oligarchic allies, to neutralize the ultra-rightists, and to initiate and implement the reforms called for in the coup proclamation were the ingredients which began to reestablish the national and international legitimacy of the government.

### ***We Had to Administer Reforms, But We Had No Resources***

**General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez**—There was an urgent need to take action against the general insurgency. It was at this time that a group of officers and myself got together and began to design a strategy to attack the problems from the bottom. Naturally, there was a need to guarantee a democratic process in the country. In principle, we needed to make a political opening and include participation by what we considered the Democratic Left, in order to reduce the social conflict at the time and to provide some hope, at least for the masses. We had to allow them (the Democratic Left) to participate in the decisionmaking process of the government. This was one of the first measures we took. Additionally, as a result of the high concentration of land in the hands of a few, we determined there would have to be a better distribution of income. Those were the strategic objectives we set out to accomplish. Unfortunately, it was too late to start taking these kinds of measures within the government at that time. If we would have set out to do this in the seventies, obviously, things would have been different; however, we had to accelerate our plan. In order to do this, we needed to overthrow the government, to have a coup and to establish programs based on those primary premises.

What we did not count on was the degree of infiltration in the various institutions, such as universities, and mostly within

General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, member of the Civil-Military Junta which took control of the government of El Salvador after deposing General Romero on 15 October 1979, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986.

the Salvadoran intellectuals, who were extremely infiltrated. They definitely wanted radical changes, including the reorganization of the armed forces, that is, the dissolution of the security groups. I was particularly opposed to all that because I believed we needed to start with what we had. One of the objectives was to avoid a war. And we believed that by allowing for a political opening and providing measures to improve economic conditions that we were going to reduce the insurgent state the country was facing. There was not a single institution that had not been infiltrated and was not against the government. The government had lost everything. The labor unions controlled everything, not only the industry, but also strategic sectors of the state such as the electrical energy, potable water, ports and airports, health, hospitals, and so forth. They had infiltrated everything and could easily paralyze the entire country. In lieu of that, we analyzed the situation and decided we needed to attack the problem from three directions. First, we had to win the trust of the people, the masses, who were in complete opposition of the government due to the deaths of several priests who were obviously involved in terrorist activities. There had been a definite split between the state and the church. We then focused on looking for someone who was highly associated and involved with the universities, specifically the Jesuit University. We wanted someone who had the intellect and had strong links with the people. This was Ramón Mayorga, who later became a member of the Junta. We then had to allow them to participate in the political parties and began negotiations with the Popular Forum, with the labor unions, trade unions, political parties, and even the ultra-Left organizations.

We also believed it was necessary to have someone of trust who could represent private enterprise in the new government. We asked them to provide us with someone, and they chose Mario Andino. I mentioned previously that we had made contact with the Popular Forum, which was infiltrated and managed by the leftists. They provided us with an additional member, Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo. Those were the three civilians who formed the new government. A proclamation was

then issued which contained all of the ideological bases and precisely what we were going to do with the new government. These were the strategic objectives we had in mind to accomplish. What we did not count on, and this was a grave mistake, was that the Left had already infiltrated these organizations and had made serious commitments with terrorist organizations. We thought we were dealing with a Democratic Left. However, they had already made serious commitments with members of the ultra-Left and had established certain links with these organizations, not as guerrillas, but as idealists. Thus, the new government was formed with five members, three civilians, as mentioned previously, and the military. We were determined to establish a reform movement. At this point, relations with the United States changed. However, there was still no military aid, and it was not very likely that we would receive any for a while. But the United States was seriously in favor of radical changes with respect to reforms, and they did support the new government from the beginning.

Important changes occurred in the eighties. On 15 December 1979, Fidel Castro ordered the Left to abandon the government and only leave the military in control. We found out later on in September of 1980 that Fidel Castro had managed to unite the groups with different ideologies in order to form a common front. This affected us tremendously. The government entered into a state of crisis. Prior to the crisis with the Left, the only serious reform actions introduced into the government were those introduced to satisfy the strategic objectives and to satisfy the Left. There had been a need to repress right-wing demonstrations, right-wing publications, and everything the right wing was saying. And that was a primary problem of the new regime, that we had to declare the Right as our only enemy. We then had the crisis with the Left, and the government was eventually overthrown. This occurred on 3 January, but the effects stemmed from what was happening in Cuba since 15 December.

We then reverted to our original state with only two military officers and no government. We spoke with the Christian Democrats, the military, and we tried to enter

discussions with the Social Democrats in order to integrate a new government. The Social Democrats said they wanted no part in dealing with us. So, we then proceeded to discuss and to negotiate for a new government with the Christian Democrats. We signed a pact between the armed forces and the Christian Democrats. A second Junta was created on 12 January 1980 with new members. In addition to the two existing military officers, an independent doctor, Dr. Ramón Avalos Navarrete, came on to the scene. Two others, Dr. Morales Erlich, a Christian Democrat, and the engineer, Héctor Dada Hirezi, also joined the Junta. The Left knew what our strategy was and blocked the promulgation of our structural economic reforms. We insisted on the promulgation of the reforms, and on 5 March 1980, we established the agrarian reform. We removed the basic law of the land ownership, and this resulted in the resignation of Dada Hirezi who was seriously blocking the promulgation of the reform. Foreign commerce was nationalized. This was accomplished under the first Junta, and I was able to get signatures of those members before they resigned on 3 January. The bank was also nationalized, obtaining for the state 51 percent of the shares. These new measures brought new hope. It also provided the *campesino* with a different situation. If we gave him access to the land, it denied the Left any opportunity to manipulate the *campesino* and his land. Naturally, the Left had no other alternative but to fight the reform since they had already spoken about reforms with clubs and cudgels and other such means. But, this placed the government in a very difficult situation; we had an enemy who was not only the Left but also the Right. We then promoted another law, for strategic reasons, which was the transfer of the land to the tenant farmers who leased it. This program was created with the purpose of having the *campesino* defend his property regardless of how small it was. And, definitely, to this day it is still not understood that these measures were anti-insurgency measures. We wanted to take away the slogans from the Right, besides trying to establish a more calm and just environment in the country. But, definitely, the Left had a very large summoning capacity. On January 23, 1980, they led a very large demonstration of

approximately 250,000 people in the capital, a capital which at the time was estimated as having 600,000 people. The people were very scared. I think that this process of reform and the restructuring we implemented had positive effects, and we were able to take away the Left's power to mobilize. Even though we managed to take away this power, we faced serious problems. The problem was how to administrate the reforms. We had no resources. A lot of capital had been taken out of the country. That year, the coffee prices dropped to \$90.00 per *quintal*. We had no chance for survival. On the one hand we had the Right trying to overthrow the government, and we definitely knew of the Left's attempts to prepare for the offensive.

### ***There Was No Real Unity in the Junta***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—The October Junta was probably doomed as a multiheaded monster from its birth. Not even the colonels on the Junta, Jaime Gutiérrez and Adolfo Majano, agreed on where the government was going. The differences between these two military officers would eventually lead to a confrontation within the Army. Meanwhile, the tension between the officers and the civilians grew. Two of the civilian Junta members, Ungo and Mayorga, identified with the Left and were frequently at odds with the businessman on the Junta, Mario Andino.

Below the Junta, the crevices widened even deeper among the ministers from opposing political philosophies, giving El Salvador a government of national disunity. The Labor Ministry was under a Communist, Gabriel Gallegos. It was taken over by the leftist mass organizations, as was the Education Ministry. The Defense Minister, Colonel José Guillermo García,

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 104-11. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.



continued the repressive policies of the deposed Romero government, letting the security forces use brute force and terror against leftist demonstrations. The Junta ordered the disbanding of ORDEN, a paramilitary network of informers and vigilantes; but under the protection of the armed forces, ORDEN continued to operate. The Junta appointed a committee to investigate the fate of political prisoners who had disappeared, with obvious aims to destroy the Army structure, but the armed forces refused to be held accountable.

By December, as the government tottered, the Junta's own Minister of the Presidency, Rubén Zamora, was eager for its collapse. Zamora and his brother Mario were both leaders of the Christian Democratic Party, members of its key political committee. Mario, a true believer in Christian Democratic concepts, would pay for his commitment with his life. Rubén, a Marxist-minded political scientist, would later join the guerrillas. Back then, he believed that the disintegration of the Junta government would enable him to dictate new terms to the military. Zamora thought that when the Army faced the alternative of either the complete collapse of the government or its own submission to the Junta's control, the armed forces would accept any order, especially those aimed at stopping the abuses. If not, then the Army would be left without any political allies....

The Left took strength from the chaos, from the bloodshed, the hundreds of victims each month. This made a mass insurrection more likely. The Left was counting on a broad-based uprising, not a guerrilla victory. At that time, the tiny guerrilla cells had no hope of defeating the Army. They were capable only of destabilizing the government.

Their plan was to lead a massive revolt by the population, the way the Sandinista guerrillas led the people against Somoza's dictatorship. First the Left needed to totally discredit the Junta by turning everyone against it. The Left began by dismantling the government. The first group to resign was the Communists—the Labor Minister and the Education Minister, Salvador Samayoa, who announced that he was joining the guerrillas.

Next to resign was the Minister of Agriculture, Enrique Alvarez, protesting at the lack of support for agrarian reform. Alvarez, who was a friend of mine, had taken the first step toward land reform by freezing ownership of all landholdings over 100 hectares (247.1 acres). He went off to head the political alliance representing the Left, the Democratic Revolutionary Front, known as the FDR....

The third wave of resignations from the Junta government, on January 3, 1980, included all the non-Communist Left and the Christian Democrats. But this group had a plan to come back as the next government. Their resignation letter read like a political platform....

A decisive meeting took place January 5 in the Presidential Palace's Blue Room. On one side of the long table sat Colonels Gutiérrez and Majano, Defense Minister Colonel García and his deputies: Colonel Francisco Castillo and the officer who would rather have eliminated Christian Democrats than negotiate with them—Colonel Nicolás Carranza. All the party leaders—including Zamora and me—faced them across the table.

The night before, I had made a televised speech explaining our position. The Christian Democrats offered the armed forces a political program, based on our ideology.... We were offering the blueprint for a new form of government—democracy. The transitional form of government should not be based on a corporative model, one that allotted representation to sectors such as business or labor. For this reason, Mario Andino, the spokesman of the business sector ... [stated.] "The Christian Democrats cannot participate...." [Andino said,] "I do not wish to be an obstacle, therefore, I resign from the Junta. But I will warn you that this is a bad mistake. From now on, the business sector will consider the government their enemy and you will not be able to govern. This situation won't last very long. God help you."

He got up and walked out of the room.

After he left, there was no further discussion. We would meet the next day. This allowed the armed forces time to consider all that had been said. They decided to accept Andino's resignation.

On January 9, 1980, the armed forces published their promises to implement reforms, bring forth a democracy and

respect human rights. The Christian Democrats' convention then chose Antonio Morales Erlich and Héctor Dada Hirezi to join the new Junta with Colonels Gutiérrez and Majano. Neither I nor the party wished for me to be a member of the Junta. My character and experience were suited for a democratic environment, not a military junta. If our pact with the armed forces meant anything, elections must come someday. I was being held in reserve for that time.

Selecting the fifth member of the Junta was a problem. The Army kept proposing names from the Right which we rejected, and they turned down our nominees. The compromise, suggested by my wife, was Dr. Ramón Avalos, an apolitical doctor with a social conscience whom the military respected.

Next, I knew we had to build popular support for the new Junta if it was to have strength against the Left and the Right. "If we're going to be part of this government," I argued within the party, "we should call a meeting of the people and tell them that we need their help." The rally we tried to organize failed. The Christian Democrats were too afraid of violent attacks from the Right and the Left. Even our party veterans, including Rey Prendes, who was then mayor of San Salvador, and my son Alejandro, organized the plan timidly, adding so many precautions that no one knew what to do or where to go. Instead of twenty thousand people, five hundred turned up. That was how our junta period began—with the image of a government that no one seemed to want.

### ***The Major Weakness of the Junta Is the Economic Situation***

**Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial")**—Undoubtedly the crisis of the military government has grown more severe in recent

Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"), primary leader of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), one of the organizations that make up the FMLN, until his death in 1983. Interview by Adolfo Gilly originally published in Mexico on 4 and 5 January 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 49. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

weeks. Their major weakness is now the economic situation. In November, the Junta issued decrees designed to close off the flight of capital and slow down the internal deterioration of business, forcing them to leave part of their capital resources in the country.

The transnational corporations are leaving. The industrialists are leaving their factories with lower-level managers and factories are operating 40 percent of capacity. In August, the indicators of economic activity had fallen to minimal levels. It seems impossible that the economy won't collapse.

### ***The First Junta Becomes Unglued***

**General José Guillermo García**—When I was given the responsibility as Defense Minister, I faced serious problems in the institution, specifically within the security corps. The situation was frightening. We began the struggle, and you can see the results today. We have security corps, maybe not as acceptable as they could be, but certainly an improvement to what we found in the beginning. I have to commend Eugenio Vides Casanova, in the National Guard, for all his efforts and Reynaldo López Nuila in the National Police. I remember at a Council of Ministers, I was asked to provide the names of those who would become the directors.

I gave the name first of Eugenio Vides Casanova for the National Guard. His task was very difficult to fulfill but very important for the armed forces. He had to renew the system. And for the National Police I selected Reynaldo López Nuila, who had just returned from Spain. He had just graduated as a lawyer. He is an honest man who has no aspirations for power, but instead he desires to renovate and to change. The same way we want a social change, we also want an institutional change. We don't want to continue in what has been the armed forces. I am referring here to the abuses of power and the violation of

General José Guillermo García, Minister of Defense, El Salvador, 1979 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987.

human rights. I can never speak highly enough of those two for the tremendous work they've accomplished within their respective security forces, that is, of course, following the basic guidelines of working together, jointly. We took great risks in order to make the necessary changes. A lot of thought had to be given to this endeavor because of the repercussions we might have received from the others. And inevitably we did. We were accused of doing this and that, of trying to institute new systems and new methods into the Army under very negative conditions. That is when we began to notice that the real enemy was inside the institution. The peak of power was in their hands. I resigned verbally three times. On the third day I gave my verbal resignation, and I told them I didn't think I belonged in this scheme of things. My way of thinking was different to what they were doing. My friends told me, "If you leave now, you are giving up, and that's what they want." That is when a struggle for power began. I am referring to the leftists against me. They began to discredit me, which is the usual method they employ—a method which has no values, no truth, no base. They began to slander and take away one's prestige. I was not used to that kind of situation because I have always tried to get close to the truth. There are certain principles in life I try to live by, and justice is one of them. I detest injustice no matter where it comes from. It is one of the principles which has guided my life and, therefore, orients me to not make commitments with anyone.

One of the ironic situations was that at the beginning of 1979, I was accused of being a leftist. However, when I began to fight against the Left, within the government, they themselves accused me of being a rightist. That is to say, the classifications and accusations against someone, in my case being that I held such a position, are the product of the people's interest who are accusing at the time. Analogously speaking, it's like the artist when he creates his work. It depends on the perspective he creates in his painting, and according to the distance he projects which creates the desired depth.

I stand neutral and independent. No commitments with the people or the armed forces. And if I have to make great sacrifices I will do it for the good of the nation, not for the present, but for the future. That is how we began cementing the basic principles for establishing a solid democratic system.

You know that in politics there is nothing better than to know a man's weaknesses, and the Marxists know them well. If they want to conquer someone, they find out what are his greatest weaknesses in order to exploit them little by little. I believe Colonel Majano had a weakness. He suffered from egocentrism, which is very destructive. They began deciding, "Well, you are the good one, and why is García doing such and such? García says he has the power. Why don't you?" That's when those who held power from the Left began to clash with me. It got worse by December of that same year, 1979, in which they said, "Listen, we're leaving. Either the Defense Minister resigns from his post or we resign from ours." Fortunately, they left. They miscalculated.

The late Monsignor Romero told one of the ministers, in my presence, "There was a lot of tension at that moment. You have the power, and you are going to resign from it now in order to recover it later? You are all masochists." I thought to myself, "I hope they don't convince them to stay, because they'll stay for good." But they left, they miscalculated. I was going to resign also. I had no ambitions, absolutely none. But I was told, "No, it can't be accepted." I measured the strengths within the Army and realized I had support. So, I consented to stay.

There were a series of conflicts at the time they left, and when January 1 came along, we discovered we were all alone. Once again we were alone, with no international support. What's more, international opinion was highly critical of us, because those who had left the government had already begun spreading twisted and slanted rumors about us, and attacking the institution. They began attacking me and other principal participants. We had no support from the United States, nor from anyone else. We were alone.

At that critical time, we were forced to look for internal support once again. We called on those who wished to render their contributions. The only ones who appeared were those in power today—the Christian Democrats. We couldn't deceive ourselves of the fact that at that moment, the Christian Democrats saw their move as something secure for the future. We were conscious of that. So they came on board, and certain conditions were established, some of which I can comment on.

One of the conditions, which was requested by the current president, and he told me this personally, was "I want nothing to do with private enterprise! I don't want to even see them." I told him I was no politician, but if I were, I would never agree with that because no country in the western world can survive without private enterprise. And, I think it is a kindergarten or first grade level mistake to think of such a thing or even say things like that. I am no politician, but I am aware of what you mean. "Yes . . . ," he said, "... I want nothing to do with private enterprise." This has obviously corroborated with time.

But those are circumstances of life, each person's way of thinking. And I think that in politics, one can determine what is good and what is bad, according to the results, not according to what people think. Time has proven he was wrong, because that is what his principal problem has been, fundamentally. I have nothing against the President. On the contrary, I respect him. He has made many mistakes, but they are the result of the situation which developed.

But, overall, the Christian Democrats came along and they joined us. Almost three months went by, and those who had spent their time in the Public Forum demanding new reforms didn't make them. The first Junta, which was composed by Mr. Ungo and Mr. Zamora, did not make any reforms, none whatsoever. At that time we were confronting a lot of problems, and we requested that they make a decision with respect to the agrarian reform. But they said it was stuck and was subject to revision, and so forth. The reform was not made until the Christian Democrats came to power.

## ***There Is No Leadership in the Junta***

**Fermán Cienfuegos**—The “leadership” of Duarte is nothing but an expression of the most abject and treasonous sellout, a systematic genocide designed to assure maintenance of the circuits of capital accumulation.

Attempts are made to counter Duarte’s fascism with the “clean” image of one Fidel Chávez Mena, a man who strives for a political solution to the crisis that will salvage not only the capitalist aims, but above all the image of the PDC, which is now quite bloodstained and discredited by its perpetration of genocide in El Salvador.

Individuals and tiny groups within the PDC take various positions, all of them based on the most rabid anticommunism, and none of them with any potential for providing leadership; their expression is limited to infighting.

## ***The Condition of the Army***

**THE EDITORS**—The coup of October 1979 and the subsequent accommodation between the armed forces and the Christian Democratic party (PDC) caused deep divisions within the Army. The need to implement the reforms proclaimed to be the rationale for the coup, coupled with the struggle to establish a government based on a nontraditional, noncorporate framework, created confusion and fragmentation. There existed a faction which wanted to retain ties to the oligarchy, favoring a maintenance of status quo and totally

Fermán Cienfuegos, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) and a member of the general command of the FMLN. His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in the Mexican journal *Proceso* on 9 March 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 59. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



incapable of accepting alliance within the PDC. There was a second faction, lead by Colonel Majano, which wanted a radical departure from the status quo and radical reforms. There was a third faction, headed by Colonel Gutiérrez, which sought to fulfill the promises of the proclamation reforms in a systematic manner, one which ensured the continued institutional survivability of the Army and maintained the basic societal structure. The internal division, although intense, was not the only situation which kept the Army on the verge of crisis. While simultaneously attempting to change the institutional role of the military in the El Salvadoran society, the Junta and the military were facing the increasingly more successful leftist insurgents—an enemy for which they were neither trained nor equipped to fight.

### ***The Army Was Internally Fragmented***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—The Salvadoran Army, particularly and importantly at the upper echelons, was internally fragmented concerning the wisdom of the coup overthrowing the Romero regime. This fragmentation was exacerbated by agitation from the idealists below—the young turk movement. So the military was divided into two camps. One group was the followers of Colonel Gutiérrez, who favored reforms in a more moderate or systematic approach. The followers of Colonel Majano, who was actually the leader of the young turk movement, wanted a much more radical departure from the status quo in order to achieve their political, social, and economic reforms.

One could say that there was a third movement in the military, but it did not crystallize as cleanly as did the radicals and conservatives, who were both committed to change. The

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

third segment would be the ultra-conservatives, the ultra-rightists, who were committed to the continual alliance with the oligarchy, with D'Aubuisson and the status quo. That segment of the military, although very significant, for some reason did not have a single point of leadership. The ultra-Right element, perhaps deliberately seemed to melt into the conservative or middle wing, either deliberately or just accidentally, hoping to co-opt it and swing it back to the right.

I do not know where the dividing line was between the conservative and the ultra-Right. I could identify it in terms of personalities, but there did not seem to be the same type of fissure between these two elements, as clearly appears between the conservatives and the very definitely left-of-center segment of the Army. Though the left-of-center segment were in ascendancy at the beginning of the revolutionary coup, they progressively fell into the minority category. Colonel García, the Minister of Defense of that era, while facing the insurgency movement that had emerged in the '80-'81 timeframe, nevertheless considered the greatest threat to the nation the division within the military. He always talked of two elements; there was always a hesitancy to acknowledge and, as time went on, a virtually adamant reluctance to admit to the existence of an ultra-Right element within the military. He would talk of the left-of-center faction which he and Colonel Gutiérrez represented. Then they would talk of the radical faction, but they would not publicly take cognizance of the ultra-Right. In fact, they were trying to separate themselves from that element. Their position was that there was no institutional identification with the ultra-Right terrorism that had taken place.

In addition to all this turmoil (the division within the military, the emergent insurgency, and the military's divorce, at least momentarily at that time, from its traditional ally, the oligarchy), the military had a simultaneous internal purge of its hierarchy. Whether they knew the exact numbers or not, no one was ever keen on discussing the scope of it. But, I was led to believe that certainly one-third, and perhaps up to two-thirds, of the senior leadership were removed from all positions of influence at that time. Because of the institution's long history,

this clearly strengthened the moderates, and moderate is a better descriptive than conservative. I wouldn't call the ultra-rightists conservatives; I'd still refer to them as the ultra-conservatives or the ultra-rightist because there was nothing in their orientation that would put them in the camp that we normally attribute to political conservatives. And they were far more radically to the right than the radicals were to the left.

### *The Army Was Divided*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—It appeared that after the coup in 1979, the Army lost many officers who were once associated with the government that had recently been overthrown. Thus, it was easy to conclude that the Army was divided, and at this point the guerrillas believed it to be the right moment. I think that their biggest mistake was to believe that this was the right time to move in on what they referred to as the final offensive. They believed the final offensive was going to last only a few months. The Army was not really prepared for a guerrilla war. Let's assume the guerrillas started out with 6,000 men and were able to increase their numbers up to 10,000. The Army had a little over 15,000. An army of 15,000 men cannot fight a guerrilla force of 7,000, it's impossible.

The Army was practically divided because when the Romero administration was overthrown, some of them left the Army; others did not agree with how the government was handling the subversive forces. It was believed that the government was sympathetic towards these forces. Thus, at this point, the guerrillas thought they could win by launching the final offensive because some were working within the Army itself for their cause. Because when the final offensive began, a captain, who was sympathetic towards the subversive forces, captured the Cuartel de Santa Ana (Santa Ana Barracks), which is the Second Brigade. I was not part of the government at the time, so I didn't have information, but it seemed that at that

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.

time there were similar operations taking place in other areas such as Gotera, La Unión, or San Miguel—I am not sure exactly. That is to say, they were counting on the fact that they were going to have two or three Army barracks under their control by the time they would launch the final offensive. Now, the subversive force's greatest mistake was to believe that the Army could not resist the attack, despite the latter's lack of preparation to fight a guerrilla war and other limitations they faced.

**Colonel James J. Steele**—To look at the Salvadoran military, you have to look at what the country was like in 1979 and 1980. I am talking about a military force whose role was one of praetorian guard, a garrison force. People joined the military with the idea of upward mobility. Certainly, no one joined the military with the idea of having to die in the process. The insurgency really began in San Salvador, here in the capital, and was characterized by urban unrest, labor strikes, mass demonstrations, bombings, assassinations, and so on. That situation was dealt with principally by the public security forces. They dealt with it in a way that, you could probably argue, was successful to the extent that it forced the guerrillas out of the capital. The movement then became a rural insurgency. However, they did it in a repressive way, a lot of people were killed. Well, they alienated a lot of the people in the process. This created a support base for the guerrillas, and we are only now (1986) getting to the point where the government's overcoming the fear and mistrust that was created back in those early years. The guerrillas went from an urban-based to a rural-based movement. The movement caught fire. The number of insurgents nearly surpassed the level of the armed forces. We saw between 1980 and 1984 a guerrilla attempt to take over almost the same way we saw the Marxists operate in Nicaragua and Cuba, certainly with political overtones, but principally a military effort. The idea that you

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5–10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

would just essentially overwhelm the government forces and move in and take over the country, they almost did that.

### ***The Contradictions within the Army Are Intensifying***

**Fermán Cienfuegos**—The bourgeois-imperialist undertaking of January 1980, based on an alliance of the Army with the Christian Democratic Party, the oligarchy and the U.S. government, did not come close to solving the contradictions that existed within the core of the armed forces. Instead, it created new conflicts and intensified the existing ones. The crisis of authority was rather apparent and was shown by the constant attempts on the lives of democratic officers. The fact that members of the military have no recourse except gunfire for resolving their conflicts shows the crisis of authority was severe, that there was no way to keep the Army moving together, down the same road.

Due to the intensification of contradictions within the Army moving together, down the same road, we see that the present Minister of Defense, Colonel García, holds the key to maintaining unity within the Army, while the key to political unity is divided between Junta member Abdul Gutiérrez and Colonel Majano. Clearly the conditions are not exactly favorable to resolving the crisis of authority. Colonel Majano was persecuted and, after resolving attempts on his life, was imprisoned. This was intended to solve the crisis. But is there, in fact, an easy way out of this crisis? Is the problem so simple that the imprisonment of an officer will suffice to curtail a widespread democratic-technocratic movement within the Army?

Fermán Cienfuegos, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) and a member of the general command of the FMLN. His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in the Mexican journal *Proceso* on 9 March 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 57-58. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

Perhaps that would be the case if it were not for another fundamental issue. The FMLN is not only a political threat; it is above all a military threat. The U.S. government and certain big shots in the Christian Democratic regime openly recognize this, as demonstrated by the desperate and hurried manner in which the U.S. government has reinforced the Junta militarily.

### ***Three Grave Deficiencies in the Armed Forces***

**General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez**—At the moment of the coup, the armed forces did not have more than 12,000 men, including their paramilitary security forces. It was a very limited armed force. There were three fundamental, grave deficiencies in the armed forces—(1) a total lack of equipment, (2) lack of training, and (3) mostly it was not being prepared to confront the type of problems we were facing at the time. We also lacked an adequate intelligence system, and overall, we were not prepared to deal with a revolutionary war, which was ideological to begin with. Which is the war of propaganda? Which is the military war? Military operations had several dimensions. And on the other hand, we did not have the ability to command a small unit. We did not have anyone prepared to train small unit commanders. This was probably the most serious deficiency. We were prepared for an international war against Honduras or against another neighboring country, but we did not have any kind of preparation to deal with a revolutionary war, which we did not expect.

General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, member of the Civil-Military Junta which took control of the government of El Salvador after deposing General Romero on 15 October 1979, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986.

## ***The Army Was Without External Support***

**Colonel René Emilio Ponce**—With regard to operations, I'm referring strictly to the military operations. When we became involved in the conflict, our military support was minimal. We basically had none. Under those conditions and without any U.S. support, we confronted the "final offensive" in January 1981. However, thanks to the armed forces and the support received by the civilian population, we were able to stop the terrorists from executing this offensive. Within 72 hours we managed to neutralize them. But, it is only fair to mention the fact that we were so incredibly limited in our resources. We did not have enough vehicles or means for aerial transportation. In communications we had limitations and deficiencies—our equipment was obsolete, and our aerial support and logistics support were extremely limited.

We could not depend on enough troops to carry out certain tasks and face the kind of struggle we were dealing with at the time, and the tremendous lack of officers and chiefs contributed significantly to this chaotic situation. We needed to organize units in hybrid formations, and in our attempts to accomplish this we installed an operation in Guazapa. We organized a battalion made up of a Second Brigade company, *escuadrón de caballería* (cavalry squadron), and a First Brigade company. We later appointed a commander and several officers who came from other units. Nobody knew each other, but that is how we set up our operations, despite the numerous limitations we had.

As a result of the upgraded training, combat experience, the expansion of the armed forces, and the aid that was coming from abroad since 1980, we managed to create organized units such as the Batallones de Reacción Inmediata (Rapid Reaction Battalions), antiterrorist groups, contra-subversion battalions, special reconnaissance units, snipers. All this provided us with

Colonel René Emilio Ponce, former C-3 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and now Commander of the Third Brigade, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

greater military capabilities to confront the subversives. But, in the beginning, we had numerous problems with regard to command and control because there was a polarization in the armed forces. Little by little we overcame that weakness. Of course, I'm referring to the polarization that existed between a group of sympathizers of Colonel Majano and those of General García. That was a big crisis, and all it seemed like, at the time, was a crisis after crisis situation.





## *The ‘Final’ Offensive and Insurgent Disunity*

THE EDITORS—In every conflict or battle, there is a significant event which stands out as a watershed. The “final” offensive undertaken by the insurgents in January of 1981 was just such an event. The insurgents were buoyed by the “insurrectionist” takeover in Nicaragua, the apparent internal fragmentation of the armed forces, the inability of the government to gain external support and the continuing problems the government experienced in implementing reforms. Believing that the people would rise up in mass support, the insurgents launched the “final” offensive only to find out that they had overestimated the willingness of the people to support them and underestimated the armed forces capability to unify around the Junta and the need for institutional survival. Perhaps the insurgent leadership’s most significant error was the failure to understand or interpret the political will of the United States. In view of the Carter administration’s history of nonintervention the insurgents felt it was inconceivable that the U.S. administration would act forcibly with only 10 days remaining in power.

## ***The Insurgents Attempt to Take Advantage: The "Final" Offensive***

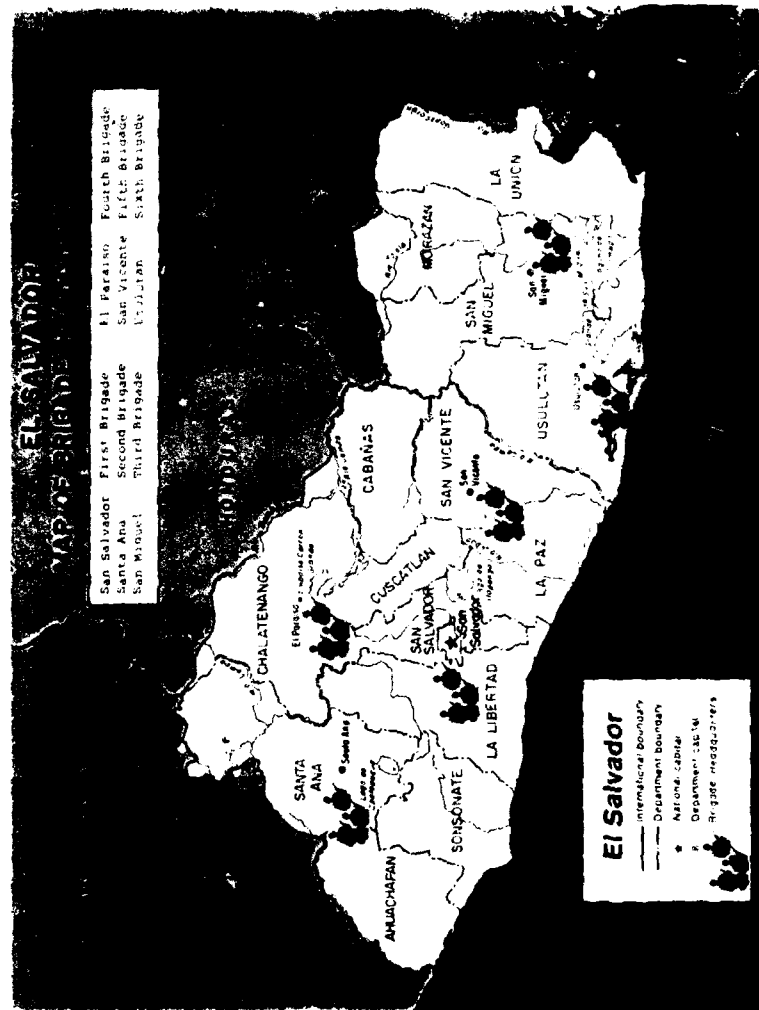
**Rafael Menjivar**—It is important to begin with an analysis of the offensive of January 10, 1981, when the general offensive was launched by the democratic revolutionary forces, and in that light evaluate developments from then on.

The announcement of the general offensive implied a qualitative change in the struggle, both militarily and politically. Here it is important to clarify a point which perhaps was misunderstood and for which we are perhaps partly responsible. There were moments in which there was talk of a final offensive instead of a general offensive. The conception was of a general offensive—a tactical as well as strategic offensive—culminating in the final offensive. Thus, what began on January 10 was the general offensive, and within it also began the first movement or the first political-military wave.

This first wave, or first stage of the general offensive, had precise tactical and military objectives as well as political ones. Most of the military objectives were achieved. One of them, for example, was to consolidate the rear guard, that is, the areas which the People's Revolutionary Army controls. In effect, after all the military operations that took place, we find in areas such as the north zone, the central zone of San Vicente, Guazapa, Sensuntepeque, that the goal of consolidating and strengthening the areas where the revolutionary movement is located was achieved. We cannot say at this time that we have liberated zones. They are almost liberated. Rather, they are zones which the enemy can penetrate but in which they cannot remain. So, we do think that this goal was achieved.

Another important objective was to cause the Army to spread itself throughout the country, in order to prevent it from

Rafael Menjivar, spokesman for the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in El Salvador, April 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 63-65. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY, IN AMERICAN GEODETTIC SURVEY, PANAMA

carrying out heavily concentrated attacks as it had been doing in the past. And in effect, the People's Revolutionary Army, the guerrillas, the militias, all moved throughout the whole country, attacking different military zones, thus forcing the enemy to disperse its forces throughout the territory.

The other objective, which was perhaps the one we achieved the least, was to sharpen the division that was developing within the Army. Perhaps the problem is not that we were unable to accomplish this to a greater extent, but rather that there weren't ways, possibly due to our own errors, in which this division could manifest itself. Nevertheless, we know this division exists, as in the case of Santa Ana, where a large group of soldiers led by army officers rebelled and were able to "liberate" a Sherman tank and weapons, and blow up what was left. However, this phenomenon did not repeat itself in other places as we had expected. But without a doubt, the effects of the offensive itself are causing a sharper division among both the officers and the ranks of the army.

Another important factor was the mobilization of several large contingents of the Revolutionary Army, which were able to surround cities. The tactical objective was not to remain in those cities, but rather to take them and then leave. In fact, afterwards there was mobilization of the Revolutionary Army without it's suffering great losses. . . .

Where we think there have been some problems is in the area of mass organizing. That is to say, we called for a general strike that was not able to consolidate and take hold completely. We think there were various problems. The first is that we had no effective military operations in cities such as San Salvador, San Miguel and Santa Ana—the more important cities with more industry and a larger number of workers. This limited the population's ability to evade the repression. So there was a lack of definitive military actions.

The other aspect has to do with the restructuring of our military, taking into account the mass movement. It may be necessary to restructure the Revolutionary Front of the masses, in the sense of increasing the cadre, who have been harshly repressed in those cities we mentioned, so they can lead the

mass movement. For my part, I would add another phenomenon which has had great repercussions; in addition to the incredible repression in the cities where we saw the problems described above. In other cities of the interior, there were partial insurrections. This spoke, in large part, to the effect of the death of Monsignor Romero. The fact that Monsignor Romero, the spokesperson for vast sectors of the population, was killed, and that the Church hierarchy has since switched to such an ambiguous position, has left the people not totally demobilized, but certainly confused.

### *The Army on the Defensive*

**Joaquín Villalobos**—If one thinks about it, at that time there were even bourgeois sectors open to establishing alliances with us, and they had political weight. They were still supporting a reformist position and had some possibility of action. In the Army, to be specific, were Mena Sandoval and those who honestly believed in the coup of October 15. They were at their best moment within the Army; there existed better conditions for conspiracy inside the barracks. Within the Army there were great hopes regarding the revolutionary mass movement, even respect for it and a desire to participate in it. They had tried to set up talks with the CRM, Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas (Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses).

... our inability to meet the challenges of the situation in March was significantly influenced by the fact that we were lagging behind in the task of unity around a common political strategy; within the revolutionary movement we had not gone beyond an embryonic level of unity, and had not reached a unity

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 71-72, 77-78. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

with a greater political content. This fact accounts for the lack of an insurrectional strategy and a more correct political-military strategy.

If in March, April, and May of 1980, the FMLN had had the military force or the number of combatants that were available on January 10, 1981, and if these had been utilized as in later stages, I think there would have been an insurrection, independently of tactical problems, and possibly the enemy would have collapsed. On January 10 this was no longer possible, given the degree of terror imposed by the repressive apparatus. The masses by then demanded from their vanguard a higher level and quality of their military presence, in order for them to advance to a struggle of more definitive characteristics. . . .

This (January 10th) offensive put the Army on the defensive, forcing it to concentrate on its strategic positions. That gave us a few months at ease and allowed us to create the seven strategic fronts, the seven concentrations of forces and the rear-guard that permitted us to prepare new combatants. Even the enemy's offensives became schools for the training of fighters the best schools of combative training. All those months, the months in which we resisted inside our positions, made us learn. We not only had the terrain to prepare our fighters, but we were also forced to solve the problem of learning military tactics in the daily clash with the enemy. We did not have a school where first the students graduated and then were taken to a theater of operations. We had the rear-guard and the theater of operations all mixed up in the same place, since sometimes the enemy forced us out of an area and we then had to come back to recapture it. Our people had to learn to do engineering work to protect themselves from artillery fire, from air bombardment, because there were daily occurrences. What turned Morazán, Chalatenango, and Guazapa into good schools for military contingents was the fact that during several months we had to fight, almost daily, against the enemy's efforts to annihilate us.

Another thing which helped in the formation of our army was that, for the January 10 offensive, the revolutionary movement decided to arm itself and carry out logistical plans.

These plans, designed with an insurrectionist mentality, basically started from two considerations: first, to have the people willing to take up arms—and the revolutionary movement had more than enough arms, even after the previous setbacks in the cities; second, to have financial resources, which were also available from the actions of the previous period. But it was not only the availability of a war chest and people willing to arm themselves that allowed us to carry out our plans. Above all, we showed the capacity to execute supply operations in a very difficult terrain; this capacity implied having plans, cadre, and organizational structures capable of achieving our goals by taking advantage of all the possibilities. If by January 10 we had not solved this question of logistics, it would have been very difficult to build the rear-guard. During 1980, the Army began to launch military operations against what today are the zones of control and the resistance that we put up at that time was much weaker than the one that began after January 10, when we were already armed. This, added to the fact of having established a rear-guard, allowed us to put up an effective resistance and get down to the task of building our army.

The other important thing was that we achieved basic supply levels, through the small actions of recuperation undertaken during the period from January to July-August of 1981, and by executing logistics operations to maintain our ammunition supply. We no longer had a problem of weaponry, but now we needed to maintain a flow of ammunition to be able to resist the Army. The Army tried to surround us, maintained the offensive, sought to clash against our forces to deplete our logistics potential. They knew that if we ran out of ammunition they would have better chances to finish us off. Our ability to maintain our logistics disconcerted our enemy. When it seemed that a front had been depleted, after a few weeks it was back in action, and sometimes at an operational level much greater than the enemy thought possible.

## ***No Way of Providing the Necessary Support***

**Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova Vejar**—It must be pointed out that, internationally, El Salvador received almost no support in the beginning, and when the terrorists began their final offensive, we had only received very few promises and intentions from the United States of giving us any support. It is true, however, that one or two days after the offensive, we began receiving the first signs of military aid from the United States. But up until then, I think our Army was composed of some 5,000 men, and I think our *cuarteles* were in the same condition as the one I described in Zacatecoluca. The largest units constituted maybe some 300 men with responsibilities that included those of an entire department. That is a rather wide territorial jurisdiction.

It had been only a few days after I was transferred from the Instruction Center for Engineers to the General Staff when I realized, at that moment, that we had employed all of our means, including the reserve. And, I think, if the terrorists had been more courageous and if the population would have given them the backup support they needed, the general insurrection they were going to cause with the final offensive would have probably succeeded. For example, there were departments, such as Santa Ana, which were infiltrated by terrorists.

You know that there was a serious fight in that *cuartel*, and one of the captains was co-opted. The terrorists were giving out weapons to anyone that would pass by. There were problems that resulted from that situation because, as a result, a lot of thugs and criminals kept the weapons. But, the truth is that the insurrection was not successful because the people didn't support them and didn't participate. That, I think, is another indication of the hatred and rejection they feel towards the terrorists.

Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova Vejar, former Second Brigade Commander and now Director of the Military Academy, interviewed in Santa Ana and San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987 and 23 July 1987, respectively.



The interesting thing is that, maybe—and that situation is rather far away—but at that time, if they had made a little bit more effort, they would have been more successful. However, the situation was under control.

I don't know if it was due to lack of planning on their part or lack of human resources. There were times when we were so dispersed, there was no way of providing the necessary support. So, strategically speaking, the subversion could have had some success if they would have attacked with more force.

### ***The "Final" Offensive Convinced the United States to Provide Support***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—We were preaching the role, the proper role, for the military in a democratic society. But, we had a very difficult time convincing Ambassador Bob White (U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador) that there was an external problem to which he should pay attention. I argued with him long and hard that this was a serious problem that affected U.S. interests and that we ought to be doing something with the Salvadoran military. He disagreed. He kept telling me that this was an internal problem, that the Right was the most serious part of the problem, that we didn't have to worry as much about the Left. He echoed the State Department's position, as evidenced in our actions with respect to Somoza in Nicaragua, that the so-called revolutionary movement was inevitable. As such they initially advocated we should try to go along with it and retain as much influence and communication with the new leadership as we could. I kept saying that was naive. It was naive in Nicaragua, and it was quite obvious to me that the same thing was going to happen in El Salvador if we adopted that attitude.

The State Department people felt there were individuals and groups so bad that we should refuse to have anything to do with them, either on a personal or professional basis. I kept

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

saying that we needed to provide assistance such as communications, intelligence, logistics, planning, and conduct of operations that would be effective against the insurgent forces; that external support was obviously going to the insurgents.

White's response was that he didn't see any external assistance, that it was all happening internally. If I could show him the first bit of evidence, the first bullet coming from outside, then he would seriously consider what I was recommending. I insisted that the first time I could provide any positive evidence, it would be too late, and that we should be working now to help the Salvadoran military, which has demonstrated a social conscience and a recognition of the need to change. We needed to help them develop their programs and support their efforts.

In my view, the State Department was not truly convinced that it was a major problem or that it was amenable to military assistance until the so-called final offensive, 10 January 1981. And then of course the Carter administration as a whole agreed that, yes, there was a problem, and we had better help. And we went on from there. I estimated three to five years would pass before we would begin to see the kind of turnaround and impacts that we are looking for.

### ***Guerrillas Overestimate Mass Support and Underestimate U.S. Support***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—They exaggerated, perhaps, or rather overestimated the people's participation in this war. Somehow, the manifestation of those few who did indicate their support for the guerrillas suggested a general support. They believed that the situation in El Salvador was the same situation as Nicaragua, and the people were going to launch themselves into the streets, take up arms, and unite with the guerrillas in overthrowing the government the same way it

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

happened in Nicaragua with the Somoza government. On January 10, when the final offensive took place, they drove through the neighborhoods with vehicles filled with arms. They began knocking on doors and telling people to come out, that the hour of revolution had come, and everybody had to take up arms. They were needed in order to overthrow the government and establish a new political power, obviously of a Marxist nature. But the people secured and locked their doors tightly so the guerrillas could not enter and force them to participate.

What could have been the motivation that prevented these people from becoming massively incorporated into this final offensive? Could it have been for lack of conscience or, as they refer to it, a revolutionary conscience? That is to say, they had not worked the clandestine labor sufficiently in order to attract followers to achieve popular support. It could have been also the fact that their own actions had generated a distancing, a repudiation and a censorship of the actions that they had taken against the Salvadoran people. It could have been that their own activities lead people to take a stand against the Marxist effort. And finally, it could have been the same example of Nicaragua, in which certain things neither depicted nor crystallized clearly were not carried out in the same manner as they had planned. The same case with Cuba and other countries, in that there could have been another element of justice that prevented the people from giving support.

Similarly, I think that Miguel Castellanos suffered a great deception at this time. After that, the real military activity began. The armed forces of El Salvador and the government, which were integrated by a revolutionary junta, called Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno, fulfilled structural changes of a social character.

The agrarian reform (which as I understand is the most profound reform of Latin America), the banking reform, and the foreign trade reform were established, and with that, the objectives and justifications of the Marxist revolution practically disappeared. They claimed they were fighting against a military dictatorship. The dictatorship had disappeared and a new democratic process was instituted. They were fighting against an

oligarchy, but the oligarchy had disappeared. They were fighting against the tenancy of the land and the exploitation of the *campesino*, but the agrarian reform was established. The oligarchy themselves were the owners of foreign trade and that too disappeared. That is, fundamentally, all those principal factors which motivated the masses to follow the Marxist ideology had practically disappeared. There were others, for example, such as violation of human rights, which underwent drastic changes. Even though they didn't disappear completely, a new process was instituted where labor and education were improved, and there was a minimization of the abuses of authority. So, all those justifications which they used, for practical purposes, disappeared from the panorama of the national reality of El Salvador.

All of a sudden, they found themselves without any banners or slogans. There was no longer an oligarchy or a dictatorship or violations of human rights. The land belonged to the *campesino*. The subversives no longer had anything to offer. So, consequently, it became another blow for the subversion.

Later on came the belief that the United States was going to back off and not support El Salvador. That was another historical mistake. President Carter, who revoked all military aid to us, who gave Nicaragua away, who gave Rhodesia away, who practically gave Angola and Mozambique away, who gave Iran away, was forced to initiate an emergency aid program for us because he himself felt the danger of a Marxist revolution in El Salvador. This was another error on the part of the terrorist organizations and, quite possibly the defection of Miguel Castellanos, is why the situation no longer favors them. And finally, another reason could very well be our own attitude.

They thought they were going to be dealing with an unconditioned and somewhat irrational armed forces throughout the conduct of this war. But we understood, at the outset, what the plan of this war would be. That is why I spoke to you about the dimensions of war. There was not only an expression of military order, but also there was an expression of social, economic, political, diplomatic, propaganda, and psychological order. So, all of those are elements that are contrary to the plans and pretensions of the terrorist organizations.

## ***We Finally Began to See Signs of Hope***

**General Juan Rafael Bustillo**—It is true that for two years we had gained little experience, but our army was in sad shape because we were limited in ammunition, and our equipment had a lot of problems. Transportation vehicles for the Army, airplanes, and helicopters were very difficult to obtain because, not only were we expecting aid from other countries, but we also had embargoes. We were not able to purchase ammunition or weapons anywhere. We were slowly sinking. As a result of this situation the guerrillas thought we were very weak because we lacked equipment, ammunition, and weapons. There was great international political pressure against El Salvador. There was an embargo, and therefore, we were unable to purchase the necessary materiel in order to defend ourselves. The guerrillas, on the other hand, had strengthened their forces due to the tremendous aid they were receiving from Cuba—weapons, ammunition, and trained personnel. At that point they believed they were strong enough to strike a final blow against the armed forces and the provisional government at the time.

There were two incidents that occurred at the time. First, heavily armed guerrillas and the subversive forces on the part of the FDR realized that the people did not respond to their movement as they had expected. They launched attacks throughout several cities carrying tremendous amounts of weapons and ammunition, attempting to convince the people that they should take up arms against the armed forces and the government. But



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**General Juan  
Rafael Bustillo**

General Juan Bustillo, Chief of Salvadoran Air Force, 1979 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 January 1987.

the people did not respond. Recognizing the fact that they received no support from the people in the cities, the guerrillas fled to the mountains. The second incident was the fact that for the first time the United States realized there had been a lot of injustice done; there were serious economic and social problems; there were violations of human rights, etc. I am convinced that our own people and people at the international level knew about this. It wasn't until then that the U.S. Government realized that this was not only a social movement in which the masses of El Salvador were uprising against the social injustices, but there was also an ideological motive behind it. The internal conflict in El Salvador began to take a different course. They started to realize that this conflict was being supported by an international Marxist-Leninist movement. We finally began to see some signs of hope when the United States finally admitted there was a Communist threat to the situation in El Salvador. They started to help us, and little by little we began receiving the military and economic aid that was needed.

Since then we have been counting on the support we receive from the United States. Unfortunately, and this I have discussed several times, democracies are not always as effective because you can never count on having mutual support nor a unanimous front. I consider this a weakness. Sometimes a country has internal problems, and these problems may be the result of a lot of internal mistakes on the part of the people who govern, on the part of the military, on the part of the people, etc. But the problem is that those mistakes should not occur, and if they are able to foresee them happening they should be dealt with and avoided, not ignored. Because if you ignore a country that has a democracy, whether it is mediocre or not, it is preferable to stand by and help a democracy that is mediocre to become stronger.

### ***Insurgent Disunity***

THE EDITORS—The Junta and the armed forces were not the only ones in disarray during this period. The separate insurgent groups were equally if not more fragmented. As a condition of his support, Fidel Castro

demanding that the insurgents form one unified organization capable of speaking and acting in a coordinated manner. The "Unity," as Fidel is reported to call it, was one of significant benefit to the political aims of the insurgent leadership. The actual combined military actions were given mixed reviews. On the international scene the development of the unified guerrilla structure, especially with the inclusion of the Communist party, gained significant rewards and recognition in the international Communist arena.

### ***Fidel and Unity within the FMLN: 1979—San Vicente***

**Miguel Castellanos**—Fidel, along with Comandante Piñeiro, dealt with the situation personally and summoned those in charge of the organizations such as, "Marcial," "Ana María," and Shafik. Marcial was the most obstinate, considered to be the strongest and should have had the most recognition. He always challenged the official relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union.

During mid-1979, at the Central Committee reunion, "Marcial" referred to his conversations with Fidel. After the first conversations between the FPL (Popular Liberation Forces) and the PCS (Salvadoran Communist Party), we had a chance to talk to the RN (National Resistance). After a meeting held with the three organizations, Fidel—according to "Marcial"—personally called him and told him that as a result of having agreed to "the unity," he promoted a major change in the line of the PCS, and that this would be a determinate factor in influencing the actions of the other Latin American Communist Parties. "Marcial" was very pleased with himself. He considered this his first triumph, specifically at the continental level.

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987. As quoted in *Conversaciones con el Comandante Miguel Castellanos*, edited by Javier Rojas P. (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), pp. 29-31. Copyright 1986 by Editorial Andante. Reprinted by permission of Editorial Andante.

When it came time to establish this "unity," all of the organizations had to make concessions in the political, strategic and logistic aspects. In the political scene, it was established that this unity must be based on the actual characterization of the government—reformist, fascist, a puppet of Yankee Imperialism. It became obvious that the armed struggle was the means for obtaining power; logistics and distribution of arms would subsequently follow.

Up until then, the PCS (Salvadoran Communist Party) had refused any form of armed struggle and had opted for the electoral process as the means for gaining power through the accumulation of forces. This implied that the PCS had to structure its armed units organically, which they had never done before.

They had the arms, but they didn't have an operative line. Only with difficulty will they bring themselves up to a level of competence; and as always, the Communist Party arrives late at the front. Throughout the history of Latin America, the PCS has always been behind in the revolutionary process.

They (the Communists) had to undergo a profound restructuring of their mentality. And if it were not for the initiative of the Cuban PC and Fidel's direct involvement in the matter, they would still not be at the front. The most attractive part of this total unity of forces, from "Marcial's" point of view, was the subordination of the Communist Party to his purposes. At last, after so many years of being accused of revolutionary infantilism, the PC took over the armed struggle!

## ***We Did Not Have the Degree of Unity Necessary***

**Joaquín Villalobos**—I have stated that in the period of March, April, and May 1980, with 1,000 armed combatants we could

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 73. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



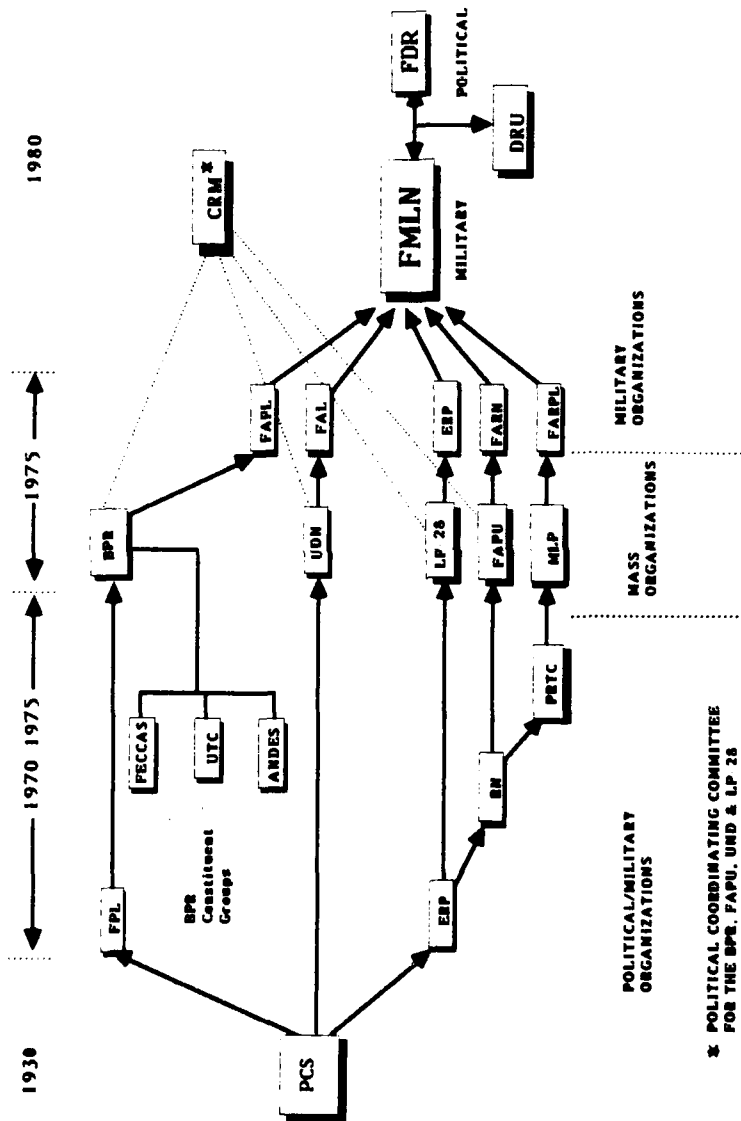
have led the masses into insurrection and broken the backbone of the Army.

But, in April and May 1980, we did not have the necessary logistics nor the required armed apparatus. And when I say that we did not have it, I don't refer to the fact that it did not exist. I am saying that we did not have the degree of unity in the revolutionary movement necessary to generate the conditions to rapidly create the armed apparatus. No single organization, by itself, was capable of going into that battle. Now, if we had unified the armed components of all the organizations, then it is most likely that we could have responded to the situation. And we would have needed a minimum level of logistics, much smaller, in any case, than what was actually utilized.

## ***Guerrilla Organizations***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—At one time, there were five guerrilla organizations. The FPL, which at one time was dependent on the church for support, was organized and set up by the Jesuits. They founded organizations of *campesinos* called FECCAS and UTC, Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos) and Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Union of Rural Workers), respectively. These organizations were created specifically by Jesuit priests. They would travel around the country lecturing about their base committees, which were their meeting grounds, and in each community they would form small groups of people to whom they would inculcate their beliefs and their doctrine. These groups began to increase in size and later on became more violent. It was just a matter of time before they were recognized as terrorist groups. Those who were capable of assimilating this new doctrine were consequently integrated into these terrorists organizations. The BPR, Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Bloc), which is a component of the FPL, serves as an umbrella for the unions and labor

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.



## INSURGENT ORGANIZATIONS

PCS-	PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE EL SALVADOR (SALVADORAN COMMUNIST PARTY)	LP-28-	LIGAS POPULARES - 28 DE FEBRERO (POPULAR LEAGUES - 26TH OF FEBRUARY)
FPL-	FUERZAS POPULARES DE LIBERACION (POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES)	FAPU-	FRENTE DE ACCION POPULAR UNIFICADO (UNITED PEOPLE'S ACTION FRONT)
ERP-	EJERCITO REVOLUCIONARIO DEL PUEBLO (PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY)	MLP-	MOVIMIENTO DE LIBERACION POPULAR (POPULAR LIBERATION MOVEMENT)
FECCAS-	FEDERACION CRISTIANA DE CAMPESINOS SALVADORENOS (CHRISTIAN FEDERATION OF SALVADORAN CAMPESINOS)	FAPL-	FUERZAS ARMADAS POPULARES DE LIBERACION (POPULAR ARMED FORCES OF LIBERATION)
UTC-	UNION DE TRABAJADORES DEL CAMPO (UNION OF RURAL WORKERS)	FAL-	FUERZAS ARMADAS DE LIBERACION (ARMED FORCES OF LIBERATION)
ANDES-	ASOCIACION NACIONAL DE EDUCADORES SALVADORENOS (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SALVADORAN EDUCATORS)	FARPL-	FUERZAS ARMADAS REVOLUCIONARIAS POPULARES DE LIBERACION (POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF LIBERATION)
RN-	RESISTENCIA NACIONAL (NATIONAL RESISTENCE)	FARN-	FUERZAS ARMADAS DE RESISTENCIA NACIONAL (ARMED FORCES OF NATIONAL RESISTANCE)
PRTC-	PARTIDO REVOLUCIONARIO DE TRABAJADORES CENTROAMERICANOS (CENTRAL AMERICAN WORKERS' REVOLUTIONARY PARTY)	CRM-	COORDINACION REVOLUCIONARIA DE MASAS (REVOLUTIONARY COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF THE MASSES)
BPR-	BLOQUE POPULAR REVOLUCIONARIO (POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY BLOC)	FMLN-	FRENTE FARABUNDO MARTI DE LIBERACION NACIONAL (FARABUNDO MARTI NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT)
UDN-	UNION DEMOCRATICA NACIONAL (NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC UNION)	FDR-	FRENTE DEMOCRATICO REVOLUCIONARIO (DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY FRONT)
		DRU-	DIRECCION REVOLUCIONARIA UNIFICADA (UNITED REVOLUTIONARY DIRECTORATE)

sectors, including the ANDES, Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños (National Association of Salvadoran Educators). They usually move around trying to influence various sectors of the population. This is the FPL.

Another organization is the ERP, Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People's Revolutionary Army), which branched out into another organized group known as the Ligas Populares—28 de Febrero (Popular Leagues—28th of February). At one point these guerrilla organizations began to break away from the Communist party, took their own initiative, and established their own political concept, doctrine, and were determined to accomplish their goals. At this point, the type of activities they engaged in were of a violent nature, terrorist nature, and they successfully upheld a front-of-the-masses, which allowed them to continue to produce chaos on the streets and at the same time strengthen their military, terrorist organizations.

Next is the National Resistance which branched out into another front-of-the-masses called FAPU, which at the time broke away from the ERP. The ERP broke away from the Communist party, and subsequently, the National Resistance broke away from the ERP when their primary leader, Roque Dalton García, was killed. He was a poet, but he was a well-known Marxist who at one time lived in Cuba and was accused of treason and, therefore, executed.

The last organization is the FAL, Las Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Forces of Liberation). This group is a military front of the Communist party. The Communist party was the last group to establish a military organization because they, in the beginning, were convinced that they could attain power through democratic means, through nonviolent means, through political participation. Then, these three different groups broke away from them because they opted to pursue their objectives in a violent manner. The Communist party was then isolated. When they realized how successful these guerrilla groups had been they decided to organize their own terrorist group or military organization known as FAL.

These are then the four military, terrorist organizations that have their fronts of the masses. Who are their leaders? Well, for

the FPL we had both Cayetano Carpio and a professor who was president of the ANDES, Melida Anaya Montes. They both died in Managua. Melida was killed by Cayetano Carpio's men, and Cayetano Carpio committed suicide. The supreme leader today is a man by the name of Roca, which is a pseudonym, and I don't remember exactly what is his real name.

The ERP has always had its supreme commander, Joaquín Villalobos, which is also a pseudonym. He is one of the original founders of these organizations and has been at the front for a long time. He is also the most prestigious member of these terrorist groups. He is very radical. Since the time of the kidnappings, his organization has been characterized as being brutal, sanguine, cruel but also extremely capable because one of their brigades, BRAZ, Brigada Rafael Arce Zablah (Rafael Arce Zablah Brigade), has launched some of the most spectacular blows against the government's forces. The leader of the National Resistance or FARN, Fuerzas Armadas de La Resistencia Nacional (Armed Forces of National Resistance), is Fermán Cienfuegos, and the leader for the FAL is Shafik Handal, who is also the secretary for the Communist party. Those are the four principal commanders of the terrorist organizations. They normally have central committees or, as they refer to them, general staffs. There they have a group of people that follows a strict political and military part simultaneously. One thing that you must bear in mind is the fact that these commanders started out with a strict political orientation, but later on they turned around to take an active military role. Then, they managed the political and military elements simultaneously, indistinctly and with a lot of conviction. These groups wound up with not only a military leader but a political one as well. Those were their characteristics.

A fifth organization that I have yet to mention is the PRTC, Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Central American Worker's Revolutionary party). They have strong ties with the ERP. It is a small group; however, they were the ones who effected the massacre of the Marines in the Zona Rosa. Their presence in Cerros de San Pedro in San Vicente is very strong, but it is an organization

that has suffered heavy blows. Nidia Diaz, a former commandant of this organization, was captured by our forces but was later freed as a result of President Duarte's daughter being kidnapped.

### ***There Is Only One Road to Victory: Armed Struggle***

**Juan Chacón**—Following the treacherous events of October 15, and their tremendous failure, all the democratic and mass organizations realized there was only one road to victory: that of armed struggle and the use of the people's methods of combat.

After the complete disintegration of the first Junta, there began a process of consolidating the revolutionary alliance until it reached the level of a revolutionary coordinating body. Thus the Political-Military Coordinating Council was founded in December 1979, which initially included the Popular Liberation Forces—Farabundo Martí (FPL), the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS), and the National Resistance (RN). This was a very important development, because it meant coordination between the organizations which were the vanguard of the people, which had been directing the revolutionary war from its beginning and which had been organizing among the people. The coordination of these forces had a far-reaching influence at the level of the masses and the organized sectors. A process of coordination and tightening of alliances likewise developed among the mass organizations, and in January the Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses (CRM) was formed. It meant more than coordination among the revolutionary mass organizations, which included the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), the United People's Action Front (FAPU), UND and the

Juan Chacón, member of the executive committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) until his death in 1980. Interview by CIDAMO originally published in Mexico, 1980, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 41-44. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

Popular Leagues (LP-28). It also meant the formation of a nucleus that could generate the broadest possible unity among democratic and revolutionary forces in the country.... There were various reasons for this. First of all, the CRM represented for us the alliance of the revolutionary sectors. Within it exists the worker-peasant alliance. We in the revolutionary organizations had long maintained that the basis for any alliance and any unity would have to be in a worker-peasant alliance, that it would be the nucleus for generating any sort of viable alliance. And for that reason we were all struggling to build that worker-peasant alliance. So now it is in the CRM that we have seen our aspirations take real shape; it is there that the forces of the proletariat and of the peasant class have converged. The other revolutionary sectors of society have, in turn, joined the alliance—such as the students, teachers, slum dwellers, market vendors, public employees, etc.

In the second place, the CRM expresses the local power of the people. It is we in the revolutionary mass organizations who have initiated the construction of local power in the *barrios*, in the towns, in the precincts. In all the organizations, we have been building People's Committees, Precinct Committees and even Municipal Committees (the base of local people's power); they would eventually replace the present regime's structures of control. It is very important to point out all these factors, for they show the value of this kind of unity.

In order to win power, it was not only necessary to unite the revolutionary forces but also to join together with the powerful torrent of progressive and democratic forces in our country, thus completely isolating the regime and beginning to build a united political movement. The platform and program of the democratic revolutionary government played an important role in this. It was launched by the Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses and then won the support of all the democratic sectors of our country. In April the process of unification took a further step with the creation of the Democratic Revolutionary Front, which became the broadest expression of our people's unity and the social and political base of the future democratic revolutionary government. And so we developed the

first stage, which then enabled us to move more swiftly toward preparing the conditions that would eventually see us take power. And here is an important point: unity grows not only out of the need to defend ourselves against a common enemy as it unleashes a campaign of extermination against us, it is also born from the real possibility before us of taking power.

That is how we began our coordination, which in practical terms has opened the doors to greater mass involvement in democratic and political organizations. The birth of unity has given us more than a sum of our forces, it has in fact caused a multiplication of those forces; through that unity, we can deepen the consciousness among the people and incorporate them at a higher level in the struggle for winning power. Likewise, international support for us grows wider and stronger. The achievements of this first stage are very great, indeed, but in order to win we couldn't stay at that level of coordination.

The consolidation of unity was not a preordained fact, not a mechanical resolution by leadership, but a process which was unfolded in the practice of our daily lives. It is pressure from the masses, participation by the people and the advance of the revolution which make our organization draw nearer, close ranks and take a united stand along tactical and strategic line. It is in this sense that we have taken some very important steps in the process of consolidating our unity: the Political-Military Coordinating Council announced its reorganization into a Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU), preceded by the integration into that body of the People's Revolutionary Army-Party of the Salvadoran Revolution (ERP-PRS). That event marked a qualitative leap in the development of our unity, because it conferred upon the people's movement a single leadership—we would now have a single strategy and set of tactics for our military and political fronts and on the international level. The DRU has announced that it has ready a plan for winning the war and that the people are only waiting for the signal to commence the final battle for victory. The other organizations of unity, CRM and FDR, have likewise been consolidating themselves, to completely isolate the enemy and increase their influence among the people.



CRM has made a qualitative leap inasmuch as it no longer simply coordinates, but now has the capacity to direct activity. As such we don't think its title as Coordinating Council accurately describes what it now does. The Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses now gives direction to the entire mass movement, and so its title is inadequate. However, the title has wide recognition and on that merit we keep it.

The FDR is likewise solidifying itself. On the one hand, the strength of the masses given to it by the CRM is increasing and on the other hand, the FDR is broadening, with the incorporation of new sectors. The participation of the democratic sectors has given FDR its pluralistic aspect and its capacity to draw together every sector of the people. This makes their role very important. The democratic forces are not playing a merely decorative role in the FDR, and they know that—still, the imperialists have tried to describe it that way. These sectors of the movement have played a very active role, they are playing an active role, and they will continue doing so throughout the construction of the new society. We can truthfully say that the FDR has gained broad international support as the main embodiment of the unity of popular forces—more, it is becoming the social and political force that will in time create the democratic revolutionary government.

As of now, we can count on a unity that is irreversible. All our organizations have made a serious commitment—they will not abandon this movement at any time. This commitment includes the intention, from here on, to develop common structures, because in spite of common leadership, our internal structures remain distinct from each other. An example is that, within the CRM, the BPR has kept its own structure, as has the LP-28 and each of its sections. With the political-military organizations, it is the same situation—the people's armies each have their own structure. But the strategy we project is the formation of a single organic structure. The same is true on an international level; everybody has their own structure and while they are coordinated, the goal is to move more and more towards forming common structures. In the future, there will be examples of such unified structures on the military, political and

international levels. That is the kind of perspective, the process which in the short range opens the doors to putting the people in power.

### ***The Five Armed Elements***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—You have five groups that have armed elements in the field. During my tenure (as Military Group Commander) they were mixed, and, depending on which department or which one of their zones of operation you were in, you could have had all five groups represented. Up in Morazán it's ERP, in La Unión you have ERP and FARN, and in San Vicente you had three groups. In San Salvador proper you found underground groups from all five elements. In Santa Ana there were three of the five groups. It depended—there were cooperative arrangements which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. Sometimes they were very effective in military operations which were orchestrated, and where each element was given a specific mission in support. One would get the blocking position, another the ambush positions, the third was the assault force—pretty good cooperation sometimes. Other times it broke down, and they would end up squabbling and pointing fingers at each other—"He didn't support me," "that's typical of this group," "they always let us down," and this sort of thing. You read the traffic, and you heard the grumblings from debriefs of guerrillas that came in and said, "Yes, we have trouble with this group and so forth." The facade appeared to work better on the political front. The front organizations operating out of Mexico appear to have the better politicians—Ungo, for example, can sit down with Cienfuegos. What comes out of a political discussion may be much smoother, much more when tailored for public consumption. In the field it may be a little rougher.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.



## *External Support for the Combatants*

### *Significance for the Insurgents*

THE EDITORS—One of the precepts for a successful insurgency is to establish strong external support. With the personal backing and prodding of Castro as mentioned previously, the El Salvadoran guerrilla organizations were building strong support from the Socialist International, Marxist-Leninist countries and from countries not normally aligned with either—including the United States. The support in terms of diplomatic recognition from France and Mexico and in terms of developing communications and logistical support bases was significant to the buildup of the insurgent organizations. While not a monolithic structure, the external support given the insurgents during this period of disarray was sufficiently broad to influence international opinions with the impression that the insurgents were in fact more legitimate representatives of the El Salvadoran people than was the Junta government.

## ***The First Diplomatic Offensive Begun by the FDR Is Paying Off***

**Rafael Menjivar**—The work that we began more or less in May 1980, when the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) began its first diplomatic offensive, has begun to take shape in international organizations, as well as in the positions taken by different countries. We think that an important example of that progress was the U.N. Resolution at the last General Assembly, in late November, early December. At that Assembly, the Democratic Revolutionary Front presented to the Third Committee a resolution condemning the violation of human rights and the participation of foreign governments in aiding the Christian Democratic Junta. This resolution coincided with the murder of the leadership of the Democratic Revolutionary Front. There were good results in the General Assembly: 70 votes in favor of the resolution, 13 against—which forced the U.S. to abstain—and 40 abstentions counting the U.S.

We would also like to mention the Resolution of the Non-Aligned Nations, a very important force, in which there is concrete mention of El Salvador. This resolution calls for nonintervention in El Salvador and supports its right to self-determination. They gave their support to the national liberation forces. Along these same lines, there was the resolution by the People's Permanent Tribunal. Although this is not a governmental entity, it is an established Non-Governmental Organization of the United Nations. Its resolution condemned the military Junta and U.S. intervention; it is important because of its practical links with the Bertrand Russell Tribunal and its successor, the Lelio Bazzo Tribunal.

There were also resolutions from political movements, such as the Socialist International, represented in different

Rafael Menjivar, spokesman for the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in El Salvador, April 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 68-69. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

governments. During the past year, the Socialist International issued resolutions that were more and more favorable, more and more clear in their support for the Democratic Revolutionary Front and against intervention. We were able to get resolutions in San José, Costa Rica; then in the Dominican Republic, from the Latin American Section; then in Oslo last July and again last November. In spite of pressure from the U.S., the Socialist International made a strong statement against U.S. intervention and it also recognized and gave all its political support to the Democratic Revolutionary Front as the representative organization of the Salvadoran struggle. So, in these organizations, most of the nations and peoples of the world are supporting us except Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala and the countries of the Southern Cone—which, according to statements by members of the National Action Front (FAN, the paramilitary organizations of El Salvador), are supporting the Junta. Support for us comes even from the peoples of those countries and the rest of the governments of the world, some with a firm decision of support and others at least critical of the United States and the military Junta.

### ***They Had Introduced 600 Tons of Weapons into the Country***

**General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez**—By the end of 1980, in October-November, the guerrillas were organizing and introducing more documentation. The information we had was that they had introduced 600 tons of weapons in the country. They had the ability to equip and supply some 15,000 men. Very superior. We were beginning to form the first rapid reaction battalions.

General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, member of the Civil-Military Junta which took control of the government of El Salvador after deposing General Romero on 15 October 1979, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986.

## ***We Traced Weapons Back to Vietnam***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—They were getting weapons; some weapons we traced back to Vietnam on many occasions. All of the demolitions that we policed up after the Ilopango raid in '82 had come out of Czechoslovakia. There was also Bulgarian, Hungarian, and East German equipment. They were buying medical supplies and communications gear. I'm sure you know that the bank-rolling was being done in Managua. I'd say that it was substantial, and it is hard to say what would happen if it were cut off. First, you could not cut it off completely. Even if it's just a trickle, as long as it's there the guerrilla knows that he has an umbilical cord back to a sponsor which gives him the psychological lift and the sustenance that he needs. It may not amount to a hell of a lot, but at least he knows that it's there. As an example, the effect of the MEDEVAC program where they would actually come in airplanes and take out their wounded to aid stations up on the border. We had somewhere in the ballpark of 100 sightings of airplanes every three months. If you halve those because of duplication of reporting, that's still a fair number of small planes coming in. The *cayucos* (boats) were still coming across the Gulf of Fonseca. The mother ships were working off the south coast; the small boats would make the run into the coast. It didn't have to be a lot; it just had to be there. If they cut it off, if we're ever able to really strangle that—or another possibility might be to get the Nicaraguans to terminate support—you still have the Belize-Guatemalan Connection. It comes into Belize, which is a sleeve, and goes across the Guatemalan border into Salvador and part of the corner up in Honduras.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

## ***International Propaganda Support***

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—They also enjoy free propaganda at a global level and international organizations that echo a sensationalist viewpoint of this struggle. As a weak government, we find it very difficult to counteract that propaganda at the international level. We do not have the resources, but they do. For example, Radio Venceremos is broadcast throughout the entire world. There is a broadcasting center in France called the Sistema Venceremos, and it works throughout France and Nicaragua. Magazines, pamphlets, bulletins, and communiques are also circulated throughout these countries free of cost. Mexico has provided them with a clandestine publications agency called SAL 3. Costa Rica collects the information coming from Radio Venceremos and publishes it—what the war is in El Salvador. That is a great advantage. Unfortunately, democracy is a weak institution. Democracy advocates for people's rights and opposes the rules of dictatorships. The fundamental principles of democracy—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of movement—are weaknesses and are easily taken advantage of by the subversives.

## ***...But We Lose Internationally***

**Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya**—That is why we believe that this war can continue to be prolonged in view of what the enemy knows to be his doctrine. The doctrine is the same employed in all the other parts of the world—countries such as Ethiopia and the African countries where this same type of war is being fought. The same steps are occurring over and over. Communists are universal. That is why they refer to themselves as the Communists of the world. Unfortunately, the Communist

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987.

of El Salvador is the same as the Communist of the United States, and they think the same way as the Communist in Italy and the Communist in France and the Communist in Russia.



COPREFA

**Colonel Oscar  
Rodolfo Campos Anaya**

Unfortunately, democracies are very particular and each democracy wants to take its own course of action and go its own way. Unfortunately, the democratic countries have several formulas for meeting their objectives and goals. The Russians have only one formula. The Communists have only one formula, which is to defeat and destroy capitalism and democracy. This is our worst enemy, and we can see that in the international forums. The moment a democracy has to fight against the Communists and Marxists, the democracies are disunited, and their votes are divided. All Communists vote the same in support of the Communist proposals. Unfortunately, our biggest problem is that democracies don't. That is why El Salvador has been condemned in many international forums.

Communist proposals are supported by Communist countries. And, in addition, not only do we see Communist countries supporting these proposals but democratic countries as well, due to the reprisals they could receive from other Communist countries against their own and the fact that they don't want to be involved. A lot of times we see them voting in favor of Communist proposals. An example is what just happened in Geneva with respect to the condemning of Cuba. Countries friendly to the U.S. voted against or they abstained. As a result, the game was lost by one vote.

Democracies are always looking after their own particular conveniences and not for the good of the whole. The Communist focuses on the whole, and that is our biggest problem with respect to democracies. The streets of El Salvador are still in flames as a result of this war. Yesterday, for



example, I was listening to an American reporter stating that the subversives had taken over the cities. They had knocked down poles. They had knocked down a bunch of other things. And they had attacked the garrisons. It was all a big lie. And the worst possible thing for us to have is that kind of propaganda which is being promoted by the Communists. We know very well that 75 percent of the Communists' budget is spent on propaganda. We don't practice that sort of thing, and that is where we tend to lose out in this war. We win internally but we lose internationally.

Unfortunately, the aid comes from the exterior, and as a result we stumble into closed doors because of the counterpropaganda the enemy has made of us in those countries we believe to be our allies. Thus, when we seek the necessary aid we are turned down because we have been condemned by the international forums because of the bad things it is reported we are doing here. That is one of the fundamental issues in which countries we consider our allies all of a sudden turn into enemies because of the Communist propaganda which has reached those sectors. And unfortunately for us, these countries and organizations have been infiltrated by the Communist regime. They are able to give their own version and account of the war before we have the opportunity to give the true version of what is going on. That is one of the greatest harms caused by the subversion because they have the support of communism, and the Communists are universal. International communism supports Communists all over the world. That is why propaganda works so well. And reporters can print any article they want, which is far from the truth because it has been provided by a Communist or a Communist organization.

So, that is why the amount of aid we have been receiving has decreased. This has deteriorated our image. But people just like yourself who have come to our country have been able to observe personally what the real problems are and what we are really interested in. I am very grateful for that. The problem lies when news about us is released to the exterior by people who are trying to cause trouble for us. An example of that is what occurs in the U.S. Congress, where there are people who inform

the Congress only about the bad things we do. Unfortunately, that is how the world is. An individual is criticized for the negative things he does and is never given any credit for the positive things, even though 95 percent is positive and 5 percent is negative. Unfortunately, that 5 percent vote wins over the other 95 percent because of propaganda. That is why many people who sit in high positions in office recognize only the 5 percent negative aspects and never credit us with the other 95 percent.

### ***The Lowest Point for the Junta Government***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—Overall, we were being crushed under the avalanche of international press coverage. We had been totally unprepared for it. If there had been some structure to handle the press, some capacity to investigate charges and demonstrate what was true or false, we might have done better. Mixed together were lies and truths, omissions and exaggerations. The government became isolated. Other countries withdrew their ambassadors and closed down their embassies. The lowest point for the Junta government came in August, 1981 when France and Mexico gave diplomatic recognition to the FDR-FMLN as a representative political force.

### ***The Role of the United States during This Period***

**THE EDITORS**—The necessity for consistent external support to a government fighting an insurgency is well documented but poorly understood. For El Salvador, the United States was the only source of external

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), p. 170. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

support which could make a difference. And yet, during this period of disarray the United States was inconsistent in its support. The U.S. lack of unity, consistency, or understanding was highlighted by the inability of major U.S. policy-makers or departments to develop a coordinated effort to support the El Salvadoran government. The perceived denial by the State Department of the need for military assistance during this period is but one example. With the arrival of a new administration, and the writing of the Woerner Report, the development of a more coordinated policy began.

### ***Two Key Decisions for the United States***

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**—To be precise, the first key decision was the decision by the U.S. Government, a decision taken in the spring of 1980, to support both the military institutions and the civilian politicians associated with democratic parties in order to try to restore a sense of authority and direction to the Salvadoran government. This decision caught the Communists on the far left totally unaware. And when the land reform began to be implemented in April, and various other social reforms were implemented during the summer of 1980, the results pulled the rug out from under the prospects for success of the Communist strategy, which has been rendered famous through Handal's travel diary, and ultimately the launching of the final offensive. The United States finally had become solidly involved.

The second key factor that made a big difference was the willingness of the United States to stay involved in spite of major troubles. I would say that here there were three elements involved. The first took place at the very end of the Carter

Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, US Department of State, 1977 to date, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

administration after Ronald Reagan had already won the presidency. That was the crisis occasioned by the murder of the American church women. We immediately suspended all aid and immediately attempted to take steps to try to force some kind of an investigation.

And let me say that it is a good thing that we did. I can still remember asking where the van was that the church women had been riding in when they were kidnapped and being told that it was simply lying there abandoned by the side of the road, where it had been found. We had the guts to restore military assistance even though the investigation of this human rights outrage had not been completed.

The second key decision that was made to overcome all of these difficulties was that of the Reagan people who were willing to accept the need for continuity with the Carter policies. They realized, in other words, in this particular case, they were working. They believed that agrarian reform, bank nationalization, and similar collective economic measures were likely to be counterproductive in the long run from an economic point of view. Nonetheless, what was needed now was continuity, not more disruption; order, not anarchy. Most of all—and this was a fundamentally correct American insight—what was needed was the restoration of the reputation, standing perception, of the United States as a reliable ally and supporter.

## ***Through the Back Door of the White House***

***President José Napoleón Duarte***—The first time I entered the White House was through the back door, for a quick interview with Carter. Pastor met me in the Old Executive Office Building. Fidel Chávez Mena, our foreign minister, came with me because he happened to be in Washington for the

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 142, 158-59. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Organization of American States assembly. Pastor led us down through an underground passageway that connects to the White House. We were late, running all the way to make our Oval Office appointment on time. President Carter was standing in front of his desk. He was supposed to leave in his helicopter in ten minutes. Without any formalities, I summed up the situation in El Salvador, asking if he could speed up the delivery of four helicopters.

"You're leaving the government," I said, "but the Communists could attack and take over before your presidency ends, unless you help us defend ourselves."

He quickly consulted Pastor about the status of aid and agreed to see what he could do. But a week later the four American women were killed. All U.S. aid was suspended. No military supplies would be authorized by Carter until after the guerrilla offensive took place.

In my opinion, Ambassador White acted as a proconsul, assuming that no local system of justice existed. Thus he could order the excavation of the bodies without waiting for any legal or police authority. In the case of the Canadians, he helped to protect witnesses who wanted to leave the country before they could be questioned. He kept the Embassy's driver from being involved in the inquiry. He learned of information about a radio communications that suggested someone in the security forces was looking for the nuns at the airport, but never revealed it to me. Months later White told reporters about this strange message, but only after he had left the diplomatic service to become a leading critic of Reagan's policies in Central America.

To forestall any offensive from the right flank and see what the attitude of the incoming Republican Administration would be, I sought out Reagan's foreign policy advisers: Richard Allen, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Constantine Menges. Their attitudes ranged from skeptical to rude as they interrogated me. They seemed to have been coached by the Salvadoran Right to think that we Christian Democrats had no respect for private enterprise. I explained that we did believe in a healthy private sector and would treat business fairly, but that at the same time

our government must ensure that Salvadoran society as a whole benefited and shared in the economy. They questioned me about agrarian reform, as if only a Communist would ever advocate such a plan. Allen, in particular, kept insisting on questions about whether I admired Fidel Castro.

Of all of them, Kirkpatrick, though doubtful at the beginning of our interview, showed more understanding and a willingness to listen. It may have been her influence that convinced Reagan to express support for our Junta government, even before his inauguration. The coup from the Right did not materialize in December when I became president of the Junta. But on January 10, ten days before Reagan took office, the guerrillas' final offensive exploded around us.

### ***The Lack of Materiel Support***

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—With respect to the aid, we did not know exactly when we were going to receive it. We didn't even know if we could count on that aid. At the outset of 1982, during my tenure, there were several attempts made to take the offensive, but the lack of sufficient materiel support did not allow us to do so, particularly the lack of ammunition.

### ***The State Department Denied a Need for U.S. Military Aid***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—When I arrived in USSOUTHCOM in 1979, the U.S.-Salvadoran relationship as a whole was not very positive. I think it was a very strained relationship when Romero was still in power. On the other hand, when the military leadership, with some civilian

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

involvement in support, overthrew Romero on the 15th of October and announced their reform programs, we really had a chance to establish new relationships. I think the U.S. Government position, as articulated by the State Department at that time, continued to take a very hard view of the military involvement even though they were the reformers. It was slow to move, was slow to give them credit for what they were doing, and remained, probably rightly so, fairly suspicious of the military's connections with the Right. All of that continued to deny the need for or appropriateness of any U.S. military assistance, the predominant view being that the most serious problem was from the Right, not on the Left.

Our efforts continued into '81 at a relatively low level until the so-called final offensive, and then they increased when the new administration came in. Again, we had some slippage for a few months, but the program began to increase. Correspondingly, our contacts with the Salvadorans began to be much more positive. Bob White never let me go to Salvador. Deane Hinton, who followed him, similarly had reluctance but had to acknowledge that there was greater need by that time. He let me come in controlled situations and, I think, specifically to serve his purposes. I didn't mind doing that because I tried to tell all the ambassadors in Latin America that I had some resources and some ability to help them accomplish their mission and that, after all, was my job. Deane Hinton agreed, to a certain extent, and I think relationships improved correspondingly as the war increased in intensity and as our attempts to help them increased in quality and quantity.

When Duarte was Interim President, I went a couple of times, and when Magaña was there I went a couple of times. I went when García was Defense Minister and developed with him some pretty good relationships. The Military Group had good working relationships at that point. My efforts to develop an organization both in San Salvador and elsewhere in the region involved establishing U.S. intelligence and operational skills in the capitals and ministries in order to work with national counterparts to improve their general staff intelligence and planning capabilities—really as co-workers more than advisors.

Our purpose was just to try to be there, to help them recognize the problem, to recognize a useful piece of intelligence, to establish intelligence requirements, and once information was available, to help them plan and know how to execute an operation. Additionally, we were trying to help them use the communications capabilities we were providing, the intelligence that was becoming increasingly available, the logistics capabilities and to keep the pressure on to operate tactically in a relevant way.

My purpose was to establish a modest network of U.S. intelligence, operations, and planning capabilities in each capital and at the theater-operational level, using that regional network to try to pull together and to coordinate the efforts that we were undertaking in each country. It was hard to do that. It was not hard in Honduras. The Ambassador was pretty agreeable. It was very hard, as I described, in El Salvador. I also tried to put secure U.S. communications capabilities in each of those locations to establish a sub-regional network and eventually to make use of the intelligence that was becoming available from some of the new systems that we brought in. We had more success in convincing the *indigenous leadership* than we had with the U.S. political leadership in Salvador.

When Vides Casanova replaced García, I was able to establish an extremely positive relationship with him. As soon as we made arrangements to train that first rapid reaction battalion at Fort Benning, I talked to Vides Casanova about his interests in going up there to observe the training, said that I wanted to see it and suggested we go together. We went to Benning and spent two or three days visiting the training of the first rapid reaction battalion. It was interesting to see Vides Casanova really bloom.

The Salvadoran military, much like the rest of Latin America, has a very sharp division between the officer corps and the enlisted. There's almost no contact, and the senior officers really don't know how to deal with enlisted people, which is quite contrary to my experience in the U.S. military.

Vides Casanova was very observant. He watched me run into sergeants and soldiers that I had served with in various



places, shake hands and talk with them and slap them on the back or talk to two or three when you got them together. Within a day or two he began doing the same thing—shaking hands with his soldiers and asking them how they were getting along and speaking to them in squads and platoon formations. I think after that trip together to Benning, which involved a lot of contact, day and night, personal and professional, USSOUTHCOM's relationships became very positive; this reinforced the capabilities of the Mil Group. But USSOUTHCOM had a hell of a lot more to contribute, even with our limited resources, but we were not allowed to do that. Why? That's another lesson learned that needs to be developed. Somebody needs to interview those ambassadors and find out why they were reluctant to allow USSOUTHCOM to develop more of its potential.

I agree that smaller is better, and if USCINCSO (Commander-in-Chief, Southern Command) is going to become involved in a visit, it has to be carefully planned. It needs to be carefully timed, have specific and agreed purposes and that sort of thing. But the total exclusion under those circumstances in 1980 and 1981 didn't make sense. We could have had a more rapid, effective impact in El Salvador if there had been a closer working relationship between USSOUTHCOM and the embassies, which would have given us a more positive relationship sooner with the Salvadorans. And the same is pretty much true all over Latin America.

Honduras was different. John Negroponte had, I think, a better appreciation of the problem, what we could do about it and what USSOUTHCOM was capable of helping him do. We proceeded on a much more rapid basis. He accepted the strategic survey right away, and we worked with the Hondurans, just as Woerner had worked with the Salvadorans, to come up with a strategic appreciation and came out with a force development plan, which also included a national communication system, on which to base a sensible security assistance program. There was a lot more that USSOUTHCOM could have done earlier, but it really is internal U.S. relationships that are more critical than U.S. military/indigenous

country relationships in my view. Those are a lot easier to handle.

### ***Friction between Cincsouth and the Country Team***

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—I don't think there was a great deal of friction (between DOD and State Department). I think always in those things there is room for reasonable men to disagree. There was probably more friction between CINCSOUTH and the country team than was desirable. One had the impression that the CINCSOUTH headquarters wanted to take the Salvadoran war over. But the Salvadorans thought it was their war. By and large, I tended to agree that their views had to be respected. Even though there were times when one had to twist their arms rather hard. The CINC, I don't know how to put it.... I do not consider General Nutting as very politically astute.

I guess, one of the incidents that I remember, the issue was where to send Salvadoran cadets to OTC. They then decided they needed officers for an expanded army and that the way to get them was to take the cadet corps to a crash OTC course, forget about the three or four years of Salvadoran West Point training. The CINC, General Nutting, wanted to train them, in Panama. The Salvadorans and some people in the Pentagon said the place to train them was at Benning.

I suggested that General Nutting come up so we could sit down with the Salvadorans, the Minister of Defense, Chief of Staff, and the general high command to discuss the pros and cons of Panama and Benning. We did that. We spent an afternoon running through it; General Nutting made his arguments. Unanimously the Salvadorans thought it had to be Benning and that for all kinds of reasons. Unfortunately, much of their reasoning was pride. They just thought it would reflect better if their officers went to Benning rather than the School of the Americas or whatever it is.

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

But there were also military angles for the kind of training available and so forth. It was perfectly clear that we could have forced Panama training down their reluctant throats, you know, but it would have been a terrible thing. I thought that having listened to the same reasons I had been listening to, General Nutting might change his view, but it had no effect on him at all. He went out and sent another message to the Joint Chiefs saying it's got to be in Panama. That led to a difference of view, and fortunately the Joint Chiefs went with the Ambassador and the Salvadorans. But that is one example where I think a lot of trouble could have been avoided by a little understanding of Latin mentality. It seemed to me to be that way all too often.

### ***Perception That Southern Command Wanted to Run the War***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—The bottom line was that SOUTHCOM was viewed as this monstrous headquarters totally committed to taking over the running of the war. Anyone that's ever been to Quarry Heights (location of HQ, SOUTHCOM, in Panama) knows better than that. But that aside, Ambassador Hinton, with his marching orders from Enders (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs), was not about to turn over the running of the war to what he viewed as a bunch of conventional soldiers whose only solution would be to add more, make it louder, and make it bigger.

What needed to be done was to keep it small in terms of focus and not become preoccupied with gimmicks and gadgets and more firepower and more and more and more but, rather, let's go with what the Salvadorans are best at, and let's try to minimize what they're worst at. And within the constraints of the budget, of the appropriations, get on with the business of making this thing happen.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

## ***Different Perceptions***

THE EDITORS—The insurgent view of the U.S. role and activities in El Salvador is diametrically different. In that view, there is absolutely no suggestion that Mr. Duarte might have had to almost beg for even limited U.S. help, no inkling that Dr. Magaña could not count on any support for his provisional government, and no recognition that President Carter had major problems with the U.S. Congress over the question of even humanitarian aid to El Salvador. Instead, the insurgents felt that there was a long-term U.S. policy or plan to be totally involved in El Salvador. Rafael Menjívar elaborates the situation in a discussion of his model of U.S. intervention in that country.

## ***The Model of U.S. Intervention in El Salvador***

**Rafael Menjívar**—A State Department official stated that they were willing to support the Salvadoran Junta up to the final consequences and in effect, they are doing so. I have pointed out before, the similarities between Reagan and Hitler, who announced at one point everything he was going to do. There were a lot of people who did not believe he was going to do it when, in effect, he was almost at the point of succeeding. In the case of Reagan and all his advisors, I think he is ready to attempt everything he says. Whether he'll be able to succeed is another matter. That will depend not only on our stand in El Salvador but also on the actions of the other peoples of the world.

Rafael Menjívar, Spokesman for the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in El Salvador, April 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 65-67. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

What does it mean to say, "Support the Junta to the final consequences." We understand it to mean that if the Junta falls, as it is about to do, the United States would be willing to intervene in El Salvador. They have said it very clearly. They are looking for, and they have made this public, a way to launch a diplomatic offensive against the Socialist International, or involving the Socialist International, in order to derail—according to them—its support for the struggle in El Salvador. In my opinion, the United States is searching for several options. In the first place, they are attempting a maneuver through the OAS, in order to apply the Inter-American Treaty for Reciprocal Assistance which eventually would have the participation of those countries allied with the U.S. against El Salvador, such as the governments of Guatemala and Honduras (which has been militarily strengthened by the U.S.) and the support of the Herrera Campins government in Venezuela (which has provided the main support for the U.S. and for Christian Democratic politics in El Salvador). And in the event that they are not able to carry out this plan, they would be willing without a doubt, to carry out a full-scale, direct intervention in El Salvador. This intervention, according to their own plans, would not be limited to El Salvador, but would include Nicaragua and also would serve to strengthen Guatemala.

Given this reality, we have prepared ourselves for a longer struggle. We don't doubt for a moment that the U.S. will regionalize the conflict—which we do not wish to happen. This leads us to make a comparison with other types of interventions carried out by the United States in Latin America and other parts of the world.

I think there are two models that the United States always has in mind, one of which it obviously does not like. The first model is that of the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, which was for the U.S. the most satisfactory in that they could localize the problem and leave the country very rapidly, with little loss of human lives (North American, of course) and at low political cost as well. The other model is that of

Vietnam, where the conflict became a regional one, where the loss of American lives was high, the political cost was high and even the economic cost was high. Analyzing the Central American, Caribbean and world context of the situation, we think that in the case of El Salvador, the U.S. is not very likely to invade as they did with the Dominican Republic. In the case of El Salvador, as in Vietnam, we think they are going to make it a regional problem, because El Salvador cannot be seen outside the context of Central America.

Nicaragua has already warned, and it is quite evident, that an invasion of El Salvador would be immediately detrimental to the Nicaraguan Revolution. It would be practically an invasion of the Nicaraguan Revolution, which is already feeling the U.S. attacks and economic offensive through the denial of wheat, loans, etc. Also, we don't think this can occur without a reaction from the revolutionary movements of Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica. On the diplomatic level, we think that if Nicaragua is attacked, other countries in the Caribbean and the world will have to participate.

And then there is Mexico, a very important factor in our estimation. Mexico has had an anti-imperialist policy, not purely as a vocation, but because of very concrete interests of its own which make it take the side of the national liberation movements. Mexico has on its southern borders 80 percent of its oil, and 63 percent of its (natural) gas, and it has an oil pipeline; but it also sees very clearly that what the U.S. wants to do is close in, through a hard-line policy in the Caribbean and Central America. We think that the United States is launching a very strong offensive, with many economic and political pressures, on a worldwide scale. We know it has launched a campaign against Mexico. Mexico has maintained a position of respect for self-determination, the same as Roldos [President of Ecuador, killed in a plane crash later in 1981.—Eds.], who practically elaborated a whole theory on the self-determination of El Salvador. Maybe there is something to the idea that the struggle over the Peruvian border is not far away. There is

definitely the possibility of pressure being applied on Roldos so that he will change his position within the Andean Pact.

The United States is unleashing all forms of pressure against us, with the accusation that there is foreign intervention in El Salvador. That is nothing new. Since last April, the State Department and the Pentagon tried to prove in the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress that Russia and Cuba were intervening. The only thing they achieved was to prove that Cuba was calling for the unity of all revolutionary forces, which is quite ridiculous if one is seriously looking for intervention by those countries. Then there are the provocations against Nicaragua, with the accusation that Nicaragua is sending arms and guerrillas by way of the Fonseca Gulf. Anyone with any knowledge of the situation in El Salvador, especially knowing the route by which the guerrillas allegedly reached El Salvador, would immediately see that it is an absurd claim. The guerrillas would have had to pass right in front of the island of Meanguera, which has a helicopter base set up by none other than the United States. There has also never been proof of any captured or dead guerrillas.

We think they will continue with these ridiculous claims. Their aim is to fool the American people, more than other people in the world who already understand the situation. The U.S. claimed not too long ago that they will present proof of Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan intervention in El Salvador, proof which is yet to be seen. This reminds us of their arguments during the U.S. intervention against the Arbenz government in Guatemala, when they fabricated a whole series of articles charging that there were submarines in Guatemala's Lake Izabal. Anybody who knows Guatemala and Lake Izabal can see how ridiculous this is. But in any case, there is a strong offensive. Our position is one of flexibility regarding negotiations with the United States but we also stand firm in defending the revolutionary process—as someone said, to the last man of the FMLN and FDR.

## ***Imperialism Has No Other Option Than Intervention***

**Fermán Cienfuegos**—The point is that the “Salvadoran” Army is no longer capable of directing the war, strategically or tactically. With the January 10, 1981 general offensive, the FMLN gained the strategic offensive and all the bourgeois Army’s attempts to regain it have resulted in major military defeats. This has had very far-reaching consequences—it leaves imperialism with no option other than intervention in order to try to defend a situation which is militarily indefensible.

So imperialism converts the “Salvadoran” Army into a puppet army whose reins are held outside of the country; an army-of-occupation with its command center in the United States.

## ***The “Woerner Report”***

**THE EDITORS**—The “Woerner Report” was one of the most important documents upon which subsequent U.S. military security assistance to El Salvador was based. It was also the beginnings of the Salvadoran planning for conducting a successful war against the insurgents. The results, over time, would include force expansion—the equipping, training, and modernization of relatively professional and well-disciplined security forces. But, these things take time. Before positive results could be attained, there would have to be a building period in which it would appear that the insurgents fortunes were ascendant.

Fermán Cienfuegos, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) and a member of the general command of the FMLN. His analysis of the situation in El Salvador was originally published in the Mexican journal *Proceso* on 9 March 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 58. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



## ***A Basic Look at What It Would Take to Win***

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—When I went down, the mission given to me by the government, the Secretary, and to some extent directly from the President, was to make sure that the guerrillas and Communists didn't take over El Salvador. There was considerable confusion in the administration about what the situation was. I hadn't been there very long, before I personally thought that it was more serious than people realized. Certainly military pressures were considerable. While the final, the so-called final, offensive had been stopped by the end of the Carter administration, the guerrillas were a lot stronger than some people seemed to realize. There was also a political-economic dimension which was disturbing.

I can't recall how long I'd been there, but within the first six weeks, two months, or so, I came back up with an analysis and my recommendations of the situation pretty much across the board. In the military, the thing that impressed me the most was that there had been a fairly effective series of ad hoc responses to immediate problems, but there was no overall concept. One of my principal recommendations was that there should be a basic look at the military situation and what it would take to win ... that produced Woerner's mission.

I consider myself very lucky that Fred Woerner was the fellow who was chosen to do this. Not everyone agreed on a DOD/JCS team. I had to specify at least a brigadier, a "Spanish-speaking brigadier." There weren't very many people who would have met those qualifications. We got a good one.

What I was trying to do was appraise the situation, make my own estimate of what was needed. I got a lot of support for some of the proposals that I made originally, and some others provoked great laughter. One asked for about a half billion dollars in guarantee funds, since it is easier to get guarantee authority than actual appropriations. At the time that provoked

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

hilarious laughter throughout Washington, that anybody would think that they would put a half billion dollars into El Salvador. It has now become far more than that, and it wasn't done the guarantee way ... I expect maybe if more had been done sooner, less would have been necessary later. But who knows.

### ***I'd Like Some of the Experts from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff ...***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—The United States, meanwhile, debated the issue of aid to El Salvador. We had begun receiving military aid in February, and by March the number of military personnel attached to the Embassy was proliferating. The idea of sending advisers came from Washington, without consulting me. In honor of the American Undersecretary of Defense's visit to El Salvador in June, U.S. Ambassador Hinton invited Colonel Gutiérrez, the Secretary and me to dinner to discuss the need for more U.S. advisers with a high-ranking Pentagon official. Several American officers made presentations about what was happening in the battalion where each one was stationed. Hinton told me the United States wanted to increase the aid and send more advisers.

"Look, before you send any more aid, I want to ask a favor," I replied. "I'd like some of the experts from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the rank of general if possible, to study the military situation here. Tell me exactly what they think we should do. All that your officers have told me tonight is anecdotal. Neither you nor I really can come to any conclusions at this moment about what is happening or where the military situation of the country as a whole stands." I had my own ideas and a general plan based on the information given to me by the Salvadoran Army Chief of Staff, but I wanted to compare notes.

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 170-71. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The U.S. military study done at my request came back with three alternative plans: one for defeating the guerrillas in a short time period, the second to win over the longer term, and a third that would just enable us to survive by preventing a guerrilla victory. The first plan involved sophisticated American military.

### ***Duarte Asked Us to Help***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—As President, the head of the Junta at that time, Duarte asked us to help him develop a strategy. We talked about it, and my assessment was that the Mil Group was already overextended and not capable of doing it. We needed some outside assistance, and we needed some fresh views on the problem. We needed people who had had some experience in the area with language ability. The Army proposed Fred Woerner. I had not known him before, but he obviously had good credentials. He was given a charter in Washington. Then he came to USSOUTHCOM, and I added to his charter, asking him to take the classical approach in El Salvador. Look at the problem in terms of the Salvadoran and U.S. interests and objectives; identify the threat. How are those interests and objectives being affected? What kind of policies need to be established? What kind of action programs are appropriate, and what kind of commitments are reasonable?

We were in agreement that it ought to be a formal, methodical, classical approach. The product was really a superb job. Fred Woerner motivated and led the Salvadorans to do their own thinking about their own strategy and force structure requirements. It laid the basis for convincing Washington, from a practical and intellectual base, what the problems were and what needed to be done about them. At the same time he established, I think, a much closer relationship between the U.S. military, the Mil Group, and the Salvadoran military leadership at the time. He reinforced what the Mil Group was

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

trying to do and produced a force development program, key to the problem, which has provided the basis for the whole security assistance program since then.

We repeated the same effort in Honduras later, and it was my intention where it was appropriate, country by country, to try to take the same approach. An intellectually honest, objective, studied approach to what is the problem and what the United States should do, if anything, to help solve the problem. The Woerner mission and the report that came out of it was what we needed at the time to gain credibility, not only in Washington, but in San Salvador and put together a program, which a couple of years later began to bear fruit. It took time.

### ***Fundamental Objective: Develop a Military Strategy***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—My presence in El Salvador was prompted by a personal request by the President of the Civil-Military Junta, Napoleón Duarte, to the government of the United States. I believe he asked for an American general to come to El Salvador and assist the Salvadoran high command in the development of the national strategy. I am not certain whether his intent was to develop a total national strategy—military, economic, political—or just a military strategy. But I believe the request was made in the terminology of a national strategy.

There was debate in Washington as to the scope of the mission. It was initially decided that we should assist the Salvadoran government with a comprehensive national strategy; however, on consideration of the scope, the effort was reduced to a national military strategy. The intent was that there would be a national strategy developed later, but I would agree with the argument that the process is the reverse of how it should be done.

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

Very definitely, a political strategy should have been developed first, along with a supporting economic strategy, and then a subordinate but supportive military strategy—a Clausewitzian approach to obtaining the political objectives. But that didn't happen. El Salvador indicated somewhere in this process that they had a national strategy. In fact, they did not. I read it and it was a couple of pages of political platitudes but nothing substantive that would provide an operative plan in order to establish a pluralistic democratic society. It was more a statement of grand idealistic, philosophic, ideological objectives—ideological objectives, not even political objectives.

My task, then, was to go into El Salvador and—working with the Salvadoran high command—develop their national military strategy. Within the context of my letter of instructions to assist the Salvadoran high command were, based on my interpretation of that letter of instructions, two additional requirements. One was to provide to the U.S. Government a military assessment of conditions of the moment in El Salvador, and the second was to conceptualize an assistance program for an unspecified period of time, which could reasonably be interpreted to be an approximate five-year program.

My analysis of the mission indicated, as I've mentioned, that I had three fundamental tasks: develop a national military strategy for El Salvador, a military assessment for the United States, and a security assistance program in outline form by which the United States would assist the government of El Salvador and their counterinsurgency campaign. I was given command of a team, as I recall, of six military and one civilian. The one civilian, actually, was part-time from the CIA, and I rarely saw him or got any contribution out of him. He worked fundamentally for the Agency in-country, and other than having him assigned to a team, there was virtually no participation. The composition of the team is a matter of record, and it covered the major functional areas. I had no voice in the selection thereof. In fact, I did not know any member of the team prior to our two or three days of orientations in Washington and preparations for the movement.

The movement was very abrupt. I believe I got word on a Friday, as I recall. I had to be in Washington on the following Monday, and we deployed on Wednesday. There was absolutely no background work done before we arrived in-country. The focal point of the mission was the development of the military strategy, which was to be done in a combined fashion so that the end product would be accepted by the Salvadorans as a Salvadoran product, and the more transparent or invisible our role had been in the process, the more successful we would be.

One of the elements in which I take pride was the degree to which we achieved that objective. We developed, in my opinion, a professional document. It was a strategy that had the active participation of the Salvadoran high command and was not only accepted by them in its final form but viewed by them as a product of their labor for which we had been helpful but perhaps not critical and which, my subsequent analysis would indicate, has served the armed forces of El Salvador admirably in providing a guide to the conduct of their internal war.

### ***The Woerner Report Changed the Perception of the War***

**Colonel Charles B. Stone IV**—It (the Woerner Report) was a very significant and important thing. It would be safe to say that the document did result in increased military assistance to El Salvador in terms of equipping, sustaining, and training, and it did give the Military Group a document to generally guide them in developing their programs for El Salvador. It was also a document that the Salvadorans took quite seriously. It pointed out the strong points and weaknesses. It changed the way they looked at and proceeded with the war. It changed the Salvadorans from a defensive mentality to an offensive mentality.

Colonel Charles B. Stone IV, member of the team which wrote the "Woerner Report," 1982, interviewed in Panama City, Republic of Panama, 4 December 1986.

### ***Comments on the Period of Disarray: A Look at the Antagonists***

THE EDITORS—General Romero had been brought to power because it was thought that he could maintain the status quo in El Salvador. But, by 1979, the forces of change were moving out of control. Moreover, some of the Salvadoran military had seen what happened to General Somoza's National Guard at the hands of the Nicaraguan people and were afraid that they might suffer the same consequences if they did not act quickly to put out the fire of revolution in their own country. To save their institution—and themselves—they would have to break the alliance with the oligarchy and realign with political forces that could win popular support.

These officers were buffeted by both the Left and the Right, and also internally. The Right opposed them because it was tied to the oligarchic interests that were threatened by the reforms. The military officers were labeled as traitors by the Left because they were co-opting the political-social rationale of the Marxist-Leninist movement. That rationale was placed within a context in which it was not likely that the "correct" interpretation of the country's problems would be made by the insurgent leadership. Internally, the need to implement fundamental reforms coupled with the struggle to establish a government based on a non-traditional, noncorporate framework created confusion and fragmentation.

These problems and their components were magnified by the inability of the Junta to cope with the war of information. This impacted the general war in two ways. It gave the insurgents—traditionally better prepared to fight a propaganda war—a veneer of cohesion, strength, and even legitimacy. Perhaps more importantly, it caused U.S. policy-makers—ever sensitive to the press image of an ally—to waiver on the type and amount of support to provide. José Napoleón

Duarte recognized the strategic implications of the issue: "Overall, we were being crushed under the avalanche of international press coverage. We had been totally unprepared for it. If there had been some structure to handle the press, some capacity to investigate charges and demonstrate what was true or false, we might have done better."

In the time-honored tradition of Latin American politics, the dominant military leadership sought to establish a civil-military junta. This effort focused on sharing power with as many of the key power centers in the country that were willing to cooperate in an attempt to establish a unified control of the situation. This would provide the beginnings and the basis for the necessary subsequent organization that would have to be established and empowered to effectively pursue the many dimensions of the struggle. Putting this concept into effect would help ensure that all efforts would be concentrated on the ultimate goal—survival.

For the Salvadoran reformers, the United States was the only source of external support that could make a difference. Yet, during this period of disarray, the United States was also apparently confused. This problem is highlighted by the unwillingness or inability of senior policy-makers to develop a coordinated effort to deal with the situation in El Salvador—despite the willingness of both the Carter and Reagan administrations to help. The perceived denial of the need for military assistance during this crucial period is but one example.

Despite 10 years of preparatory work and the decision to try to take control of the country, the Marxist-Leninist movement was not ready to take advantage of the near anarchy of the time. The various leftist factions had not unified in any significant way, and they were not agreed on any common political-military strategy. At that point in time, the movement consisted of at least five different organizations—the



Moscow-oriented FAL and FPL, the Socialist FARN, the Maoist ERP, and the Trotskyite PRTC. It was Cuba's Fidel Castro who personally prodded the various leaders into joining their disparate forces under an umbrella organization now known as the FDR/FMLN.

Thus, to both insurgents and incumbents, the strategic solution to the mutual problems of confusion and disarray was to begin to create a unity of command and effort. Without a body at the highest level that can establish, enforce, and continually refine cogent objectives, authority is fragmented, and there is no way to resolve the myriad problems endemic to war and survival. That could mean failure or, at best, no win for either side. Again, only the United States had the luxury of ignoring the central reality of the period.

*Part* **III**

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*Insurgent Ascendancy  
from Late 1981  
to Late 1984*



## ***The Converging Major Insurgent Actions***

THE EDITORS—The setting at the end of 1981 was not bright for the El Salvadoran government. The guerrillas had established a coordinated political front, had solidified external support, had built up logistical stores, and had reasons to believe they could have a successful people's war, isolating the government and defeating the military forces. The government had developed, with the aid of the Woerner Report, a national plan but was still divided, both inside and outside the military, on how to proceed.

### ***One Road to Power***

**Juan Chacón**—The democratic and mass organizations realized there was only one road to victory: that of armed struggle and the use of the people's methods of combat.... In order to win power, it was not only necessary to unite the

Juan Chacón, member of the executive committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) until his death in 1980. Interview by CIDAMO originally published in Mexico, 1980, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 41-43. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

revolutionary forces, but also to join together with the powerful torrent of progressive and democratic forces in the country, thus completely isolating the regime and beginning to build a united political movement. . . . And so we developed that first stage, which then enabled us to move more swiftly toward preparing the conditions that would eventually see us take power. And here is an important point: Unity grows not only out of the need to defend ourselves against a common enemy as it unleashes a campaign of extermination against us. It is also born from the real possibility of us taking power.

### ***Consolidation and Changes: Irregular War Becomes a Fundamental Element***

***Captured FMLN Document***—The development of the military strategy of the FMLN has gone through distinct phases which responded to each period of the war and to successive levels of our experience. These processes of growth each climaxed in new phases.

After the offensive of 10 January 1981 our revolutionary process embarked on a new course requiring some years in order to achieve precise strategic characteristics which would permit us to foresee the direction the war would take and to develop our plans in the best way. The process of developing our best military strategy for us to face the changed character of the war, begins with the end of the insurrectional approach [March 1982].

This meant that the first national crisis of the revolutionary situation had ended. It was now necessary, because of the new

From "Concerning Our Military Plans: The Military Strategy of the FMLN," (document captured and transcribed by the Atlacatl Battalion, near Perquín, El Salvador, date unknown, probably late 1983), in *The Comandantes Speak: The Military Strategy of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front*, translated and edited by Gabriel and Judith F. Marcella, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College, March 1987, pp. 2-7, 19-22.

circumstances, to develop a process of political and military growth which would maintain the revolutionary direction until a new revolutionary situation emerged.

From then on we implemented different approaches which responded to each period of the war, each of which generated processes of growth whose climax required new plans. Accordingly, based upon the plan of massing our forces, we achieved the consolidation of the strategic rear of the FMLN.

This is the period during which, by seeking the decisive battle (*Batalla Síntesis*), we provoked a profound attrition of the enemy, projecting the masses into a new phase of war with a victorious advance which opened new national and international expectations about the war in El Salvador and the prospects for victory by the FMLN. This period left us with a strong strategic military force, with growth and ability to execute attacks on a grand scale.

This means that the next phase in the growth of forces cannot have the same characteristics since it requires not only a new plan of military attack, but also a new and more integrated union with the political struggle. This is due to the results achieved in previous phases which have created favorable political strategic conditions which will multiply the impact of the military advance.

The territorial expansion, which will ensue by opening new theaters of operations, will make the masses grow. It will be necessary to incorporate them as well as other social sectors which are potential allies of the revolutionary forces. This will be an essential feature of our strategy in the next phase of the war.

Similarly, the expansion of territory under control will permit us to organize the masses in the zones liberated. This will require a new strategic effort.

In the previous period our military approach was based on the application of regular tactics, where the massing of force was the determining factor for striking large targets. This meant the strategic necessity of achieving growth objectives which solved the problem, not only of combat losses, but also of expansion of regular units in our army....

According to the basically conventional mode in which we were fighting the war and making a linear interpretation of its progress, a simple logic could have led us to conclude that the continuity of our strategic plan should be achieved through an accelerated and planned growth of the strategic mobile force and the gathering of large logistic and financial stores, which would place us in condition to defeat the strategic objectives of the enemy.

Coming to this conclusion might make us lose sight of the dialectic nature of the revolutionary process, of the interplay of political, military and ideological factors and of the need for a precise combination of the qualitative and quantitative elements of our growth process. The temporary dominance of this view is what forces us to recruit in a way which breaks with the natural manner of integrating the masses into the war. Thus we are faced with negative consequences for our relations with them in the national and international political scene at a time when we have before us the reactivation of the masses in the cities and the need to work with the masses in the zones of control in a manner appropriate to their environmental characteristics.

The growth achieved in the previous phases of the war has generated conditions for the development of political factors and the possibility of deploying military tactics which generate new elements of political and military cooperation. These, accompanied by the action of the strategic mobile force, would mark a new course in the advance of the war. From all of this we conclude that at this stage of the war we need to move to combine with certainty, regular and irregular tactics, conventional war and guerrilla war; that is to say, the combining of guerrilla and regular forces.

We now have the strategic mobile force and we must move to form guerrilla units which will constitute the instrument with which we will apply a new tactical mode to strike the enemy—in defense when he makes incursions into the zones of control, as well as in offense in his vital areas and his strategic rear.

The same regular strategic forces must learn to break up into small units to fight in guerrilla fashion and reconfigure in order to strike in the regular manner.

The development of guerrilla tactics will open a field of military cooperation that will permit the strategic mobile force to defeat enemy objectives and assure our operational continuity. Accordingly, we will also secure our preparation to face the escalation of the war and even the invasion by Yankee troops.

The guerrilla units base their action on a political military concept in which the ties with the masses are the vital element for survival, for fighting and for expansion.

In the organization and integration of the masses is founded the support base, the intelligence, the subsistence, and above all, the growth of new guerrilla units, which in the future will provide experienced combatants to strengthen the strategic mobile force.

Within the guerrilla war, the urban commands, the neighborhood forces and the self defense units are fundamental to reach the cities and construct clandestine apparatus in them. These are linked to the masses and have a decisive role in fighting and in the destabilization and wearing down of the enemy and the political process.

In the takeoff phase of the application of the new tactical mode, we must support the development of guerrilla units with the participation of leaders, units, and battle-seasoned combatants in the strategic mobile force that accelerates their becoming qualified and effective.

The development of the guerrilla units and the application of the new tactical mode multiplies our chances of operating in various directions, but the most important thing is that it places within our reach the possibility of introducing ourselves permanently in the nerve centers of the enemy and of striking him in his rear guard.

Our military tactics for this period must correspond to the following elements:

1. Help strengthen the line of the masses.
2. Defend efficiently the conquered territories.
3. Impede the military strengthening of the enemy.
4. Prepare our forces to face the intervention.
5. Wear down the enemy on a grand scale.

6. Take maximum advantage of our means of war.
7. Create the conditions whereby our mobile force can strike strategic objectives.

In summary, irregular warfare is now a fundamental element and we have not sufficiently developed this tactic. Our forces have become very regular. Our commanders have not had to operate in small units and blend in with the masses.

It is necessary and urgent that our guerrilla squadrons and platoons take the initiative in operating in small units in the enemy's rear, using camouflage, secret hideouts, popular support, small arms, explosives, and infiltration into the enemy's environment. This implies the participation of women, children, and even old people, using all kinds of trickery and devices to deceive the enemy and strike him wherever and in whatever form he least expects. We need to develop deeply the creativity and audacity of our leaders in the application of guerrilla tactics. Therefore, the war of guerrillas requires that each combatant be a political organizer of the masses because these are vital elements in assuring that we strike the enemy.

The political and ideological education of the guerrilla units and of the entire mobile strategic force, is fundamental since without it they will not be able to work the masses and they will not have the initiative.

Explosives and all forms of arms such as mines, traps, and firing become essential elements of our plans. Accordingly, our whole force becomes a guerrilla one; all fighters must understand the principles of guerrilla warfare and have the ability to apply them (knowledge of topography, target, tactical superiority, secrecy, surprise, high mobility, etc.). This will permit us to use the concentrated force when we decide to take on a large target and to disperse into guerrilla platoons and squadrons when we consider it necessary.

Our guerrilla force must know how to hide and to mobilize in secret. We must keep in mind that in this phase of the war the human and logistical attrition of the enemy is a fundamental factor. It is not so important to recover great quantities of arms, as it is to cause large numbers of casualties, using the minimum of resources and people. It is also important to make the enemy



lose political authority over the territory and people, verifying that he is incapable of striking us and that wherever he may be, we can surprise him.

The frontal attacks of our mobile strategic force should be resolute and strong. The enemy by operating in our zones will attempt to push us [to] use up logistical supplies and to cause us casualties as he uses massive aviation and artillery.

Against this we must apply creatively small unit guerrilla tactics, with explosives and sharpshooters, to wear down the enemy. We must not evade any more enemy operations; we must take advantage of each operation to wear down his troops with little human and material effort on our part.

All of the enemy rear (cities and highways) is within our reach if we use the appropriate tactics. The rear is the place where the enemy is the most vulnerable; he moves in trucks, trains his troops, and reduces his security. With the appropriate tactics and with few men and many explosives we can cause more casualties with the strategic mobile force than can be caused in many battles, which might require thousands of rounds and a normal number of casualties for us.

We should realize that defeating the strategic objectives of the enemy implies:

- a. Cooperation in a national campaign in the western part of the country.
- b. Strong pressure by guerrilla units on the enemy rear.
- c. Strong attrition of enemy troops.
- d. Support of the masses and political work to break up enemy troop units.

## ***Unification of the Guerrilla Organizations***

THE EDITORS—On 11 October 1980, the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) announced the founding of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which is charged with and structured for making strategic decisions regarding the direction of the

revolutionary war. The FMLN is made up of the Popular Liberation Forces—Farabundo Martí, the People's Revolutionary Army, and the Armed Forces for National Liberation; it was directed, politically and militarily, by the DRU. On 11 November, the Armed Forces of National Resistance were also incorporated into the FMLN.

**Juan Chacón**—The development of unity among the Salvadoran people is the principal factor in their revolutionary struggle for liberation. It is characterized by solid unity, a rock-like unity which is now irreversible. Our revolutionary, democratic and mass organizations had to take a series of steps that have now made it possible to consolidate. Previously the organizations existed independently of each other. That is, they developed separate fronts of resistance, each has its own strategy, tactics and methods of struggle, and this resulted in a lack of coordination between the struggles we waged. However, with the development of the revolutionary process itself, the growth of our forces and the beginning of a new stage in the people's war, these organizations find that they must unify and coordinate their efforts against the enemy—North American imperialism, the Salvadoran oligarchy, and the reactionary military. In practice, the ranks began closing among the mass organizations last October. In November and December 1979, an alliance was being consolidated. Unity was not achieved overnight, but followed a process of rapprochement until there was finally a convergence in tactical and even strategic planning.

The unification of revolutionary forces resulted from necessity, and practically every mass organization in our country anticipated it and included it in its strategy. However,

Juan Chacón, member of the executive committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) until his death in 1980. Interview by CIDAMO originally published in Mexico, 1980, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 40-41. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

each organization had its own idea of what that unity would mean and the methods to be used in achieving it. It is very important, that every organization, without exception, saw the unification of mass forces and the formation of a single, broad, united front as necessary for taking power.

**Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial")**—In recent months the revolutionary forces have grown much stronger. The coordination that we have achieved by forming the FMLN doesn't signify a mere increase in forces, but a qualitative leap. It enables us to plan operations on a greater scale, to combine small operations with large ones, to concentrate our fire power when we decide to, to choose our objectives better and with greater possibilities of success. The wearing down of the enemy forces matches our increasing fire power. Their tanks are not invulnerable. The use of the equipment they can count on is reaching a saturation point, since it has to be transferred from one front to another, and then worn-out parts aggravate the damage done by our fire power. We are now using bazookas, high power mines, grenade launchers and mortars all the time. Other arms will soon be brought into combat.

## ***Guerrilla Unity***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—The document that was found back in July '84 was an analysis of the subversives' activities, and it revealed their weaknesses with respect to the political doctrine of their forces. For this reason their forces had

Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"), primary leader of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), one of the organizations that make up the FMLN, until his death in 1983. Interview by Adolfo Gilly originally published in Mexico on 4 and 5 January 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 53. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

lost all presence, courage, and bravery. They did not have the ideological motivation that is so characteristic of a Marxist. I remember that at that time they had decided to sacrifice the military instruction in order to give more importance to the political instruction. We learned a lot from that move. It just goes to show you that a Marxist's greatest motivation, what causes him to make sacrifices and accomplish his objectives, is an ideological nature and not essentially of a political or strictly military nature. Nor are they necessarily driven by motivation geared towards the stomach; more the heart. It is all centered right here, and that is the principal motor that drives the terrorist forces to do what they do.

All these [guerrilla] organizations were united thanks to Fidel Castro. He called them to La Habana and told them that he was willing to provide assistance if and when they would form a single organization called the FMLN. This happened more or less back in December of 1980. I'm not altogether sure about the month, but I am sure about the year. This is when the four separate guerrilla organizations united into one single front without renouncing to their own particular problems. Then they began to deploy their forces throughout different areas. Unlike the situation we had previously where the groups were so intermingled with each other, we now see organized groups divided throughout the country, and each begins to work out in his assigned area.

### ***Offensives: December 1981 to the End of October 1983***

**Joaquín Villalobos**—After January [1981], we could not start an insurrectional counteroffensive on short notice. It was

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 86-98. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.



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**Colonel Miguel Mendez briefs President Duarte and General Adolfo Blandon.**

obvious that what we needed to do was to strengthen our military power. The six months following January were a period of resistance, of consolidation of the rear guard, of development of our forces, of achieving greater military ability.

*Pressure on the urban centers.* The military process from December to March was characterized by the political content of the different actions. There was a need to put pressure on the urban centers, to carry out spectacular actions such as the one that took place at the airport, with the purpose of demoralizing the army and heightening the combativeness of the masses. During this period actions took place against the capital, Santa Ana, Usulután, San Vicente, San Miguel—practically all the major cities in the country. The attack against the air force base at Ilopango on January 27, 1982, was a commando action which destroyed 70 percent of the airplanes and helicopters of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. This action shocked the Army.

*The effort against the election.* The FMLN's military offensive of March [1981] took place in the context of

continuous pressure against urban centers, and the elections of March 28. To transform this date into the beginning of the enemy's debacle we needed an action of strategic significance and audacious employment of the forces of the revolutionary movement. Not to go out with 10 or 15 percent of our strength, but to use 100 percent of our forces. Without seeking a final battle, we still had to fight a strategic battle that could at least weaken the results of the election. Essentially the plan was to try for a military victory at some place in the country that would unleash an insurrectional process there and, if successful, then allow for two other developments: One, that the revolutionary movement could redeem for itself the force represented by the urban masses and in this way proceed along insurrectional lines that would accelerate the war. Second, that the enemy would begin to crumble and fall apart, so that the situation would then lead to a final offensive. If that did not work, then our plan was to try to maximize the obstacles to the electoral process, and this we did manage fairly well. The results were felt with time.

We decided on Usulután for the following reasons: First, the weakness of the Army garrison, made up of 300 to 400 men who could be forced to surrender if we maintained a siege for several days. Second, the front located there was capable of exerting pressure on the city, of surrounding the city and controlling its access routes and means of communication. Third, of the eastern part, it is the city where the urban masses have a higher political level, the best history and tradition of struggle, and therefore, their participation in insurrectional actions was more likely. Fourth, the FMLN could concentrate there a good proportion of its forces, and it was possible for other fronts to cooperate militarily by controlling the access routes. Finally, in that front we had forces with greater experience in urban combat because of their frequent incursions into the cities.

So, what happened? The first goal was accomplished, with the participation of hundreds of people in the Usulután actions. We occupied the city for over one week, and reached positions within a few meters from the garrison. The whole eastern part



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During the height of the military effort, January-February 1984, military commanders met in Morazan. From the left, Monterosa, Cruz, Blandon, and Zepeda.

of the country was destabilized, preventing the elections from taking place in four Departments: Usulután, San Miguel, Morazán, and La Unión.

The Army, considering that the guerrilla army had been weakened by the electoral process, took time out to dedicate itself to internal conflicts and didn't even imagine the significant improvement that the FMLN was to show during the June campaign. For all these reasons we do not feel that the battles of March ended in a defeat of our forces. We simply did not reach the strategic goals we had set.

*The June campaign against the Army.* The enemy considered us to be defeated after they reoccupied Usulután. We responded in June, and in this period a decisive strategic shift

took place. The defeat of the Salvadoran Army began, and the revolutionary movement advanced irreversibly toward victory. We demonstrated before the world that we could win the war. With the end of the electoral process our actions against the enemy no longer had to be determined by the political implications of a specific situation, a previous reality which had forced us to subordinate our military activity to the political demands of the moment. Our fundamental problem now became how to militarily crush the Army.

We encircled Perquín, one of the most important positions from the point of view of the terrain, in the Department of Morazán. It was a minor position, with about 50 soldiers, a small garrison. We were not interested in the position itself, only in attacking the reinforcements that we assumed the Army would send in. That position is the most important on the north, and of great utility for the Army's communication with Honduras.

As we expected, the Army moved in by air two companies to San Fernando, which is immediately west of Perquín, about 10 kilometers away. It also ordered the Perquín garrison to retreat, hoping to recapture the position later. Some did manage to escape, others were captured and taken prisoner, and our forces occupied the town.

At that time, our plan was different from previous ones—reflecting very clearly the qualitative development in our tactics—since we no longer cared if we maintained control over Perquín. We obviously maintained the control over the town, but to advance in our major aim, we put the emphasis on surrounding the enemy's reinforcements, 250 soldiers that were assigned at that time to San Fernando.

Circumstances forced a new Army movement to take place: Three companies were brought from Torola, southwest of San Fernando. That was the opportunity we were looking for. The enemy fell into our trap. We knew that a classical ambush had few chances of success, because the Army already knew about our behavior, knew about our ambushes and harassment tactics, etc. Obviously their plan was to gain control of the high ground, that is, the strategic position, to advance along the access routes without problems.





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The Morazan Battalion in the field.

We had also prepared ourselves for that, to execute maneuvers to envelop the enemy while moving. In the end, it was the same ambush principle. The key problem was to annihilate an important Army unit while it was moving. That was our line of reasoning. How could it be accomplished? The answer would be given by the terrain and the behavior of the enemy.

So, what happened to the three companies from Torola that were trying to save the 250 soldiers surrounded in San Fernando? The Army moved in by foot, and not only through the main road. When they detected us they tried to move through our flank, through a small canyon, at a lower spot in the area. We detected their maneuver, enveloped them, and finally annihilated their units while they were in that position. When you are in that situation it is extremely dangerous to occupy a low spot.

The final results of this action were 43 prisoners, 80 dead, the capture of over 170 automatic rifles, 12 support weapons including light artillery, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. And in the final phase we also reaped a military

and political victory, when we shot down the helicopter that was transporting the Undersecretary of Defense, as he tried to reach San Fernando to improve the morale of the surrounded forces. Several days later, units of the FMLN captured the Undersecretary as he tried to escape towards Honduras.

*The offensive against all forms of movement.* The June campaign was continued by the August operations. In other words, it was practically an uninterrupted plan, that diminished in intensity, of course, but that lasted three months: June, July, and August. Then came a lag during September and the first 10 days in October, when we started our next campaign.

The new military concept used towards the end of the campaign, in about July 1982, which was to sabotage all forms of transportation, commercial, national, fuel transports, etc., is a better developed form of the notion of attacking the enemy while in movement.

The sabotage of transportation would reach strategic significance. Closing down, blockading the means of communication; harassment ambushes against enemy units trying to clear the roads to allow the movement of goods and the delivery of inputs for the cultivation of cotton, coffee, and other crops; all will become a fundamental part of our plans. The Army is starting to be hit while attempting to clear the roads. The new modality, which forces the Army to move and allow us to attack right when its defenses are lowered, is becoming a new law for the revolutionary movement; it is a leap in the quality of our forces.

We can say that the two main highways in the country, the Panamerican and the coast highways, going from El Salvador to the east and north, were about 75 percent shut down, and traffic towards the west was also diminished by some actions, although they had less effect. This is a zone where the revolutionary movement does not have sufficient strength to act against highways; but towards the east and north, towards Chalatenango, transport was virtually paralyzed.

The actions during the June campaign ended with the capture of the Undersecretary of Defense; the disarticulation of two Army companies; the capture of over 200 weapons in a



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**March 1986, Psyops and Intelligence troops in Chalatenango treated and evacuated wounded guerrillas left behind in a cave.**

single front, Morazán; the forced withdrawal into Honduras of 250 surrounded soldiers; and the participation of 6,000 Salvadoran and 3,000 Honduran soldiers in an operation against a single front that yielded not one positive result to them. They could not dislodge us from our positions and instead left behind 500 casualties and tens of prisoners. And, most fundamentally, we were able to show that we can win the war, and win it in a military sense. That was our aim when we planned the June campaign.

All of this was possible because of the sharp improvement in our tactics. The revolutionary movement went beyond the defense of positions and reached a stage of war of maneuvers; the control of the means of communication emerged as the fundamental element of its military tactics. This destroyed all of

the plans and the Army was beginning to progressively weaken. At the same time, this change in tactics allowed the revolutionary movement to open up a permanent logistical reservoir, through the capture of the Army's weaponry.

In this campaign, the revolutionary movement finishes the battle with more logistics than we had to begin with and with far fewer casualties than those suffered in any previous combat. These casualties are mostly due to the fact that, since we are constantly on the move, we have no time to build defense structures, so enemy artillery is more effective as is the air force, with its helicopters and airplanes. This is what now causes our casualty rate.

These are the main results of this campaign. Another positive result was that we were able to change the terms of the military debate within the FMLN. We changed the method with which we prepare our plans; they have become more practical, with less political debate.

*The Ciudad Barrios ambush.* The August operations were of great importance because they blocked the Army's ability to move about. That was the role played by the ambush on the road to Ciudad Barrios, the occupation of Yamabal, and the occupation of the San Carlos Hacienda near the Cacahuatique Volcano. Together, these actions added up to the loss of more than an entire Army company—between dead, wounded, prisoners, and captured weapons.

This time the Army did not take the necessary precautions to travel; it went aboard trucks and on the main road that leads to that city, which had been taken over by the FMLN that morning. To guarantee the ambush, we deployed our forces eight kilometers from the objective, and we created the impression that we were carrying out a harassment operation against the city, to encourage the enemy's movement. In this way they fell into a classical ambush, where we utilized mines and automatic rifles against the trucks as they went by, causing practically the complete annihilation of that whole group of reinforcements. This provoked a crisis in the movements of the Army, which had a great impact on later military plans. The Army lost maneuverability, and this weakened its minor

outposts and positions. The other important factor is that we occupied a city of over 20,000 inhabitants, Ciudad Barrios, something we had never seen before.

### *The October Campaign*

**THE EDITORS**—As time progressed from the "Final Offensive" through the end of 1984, it became more and more evident that the insurgent organizations were not interested in reforming the Salvadoran society. Indeed, reform appears to be no more than a pretext to rally support both internally and externally. After reforms were, in fact, initiated by the government, the real objective of the "revolutionaries" became obvious—take power. In October 1982, the FMLN began a prolonged, nearly constant offensive.

**Joaquín Villalobos**—In the previous campaign we wanted to prove that we could win the war. Now we wanted to push the Army to the point where its morale would collapse. To beat an army it is not necessary to annihilate all its men, nor to capture all its arms, only to cause the collapse of its morale. How can we achieve our aim? On the basis of deepening the three lines of the previous campaign: First, actions of strategic annihilation wherever possible. Second, destabilizing the country through sabotage, fundamentally against transportation, power lines, telephone lines, and fuel. Third, harassment ambushes and annihilation of minor positions. By deepening these lines of action, making better use of all our forces and taking advantage of our high combative morale and the large efforts of all our

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 86-98. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

fronts to further their development, we are making progress in our aim to provoke a collapse of the enemy's morale.

The Army has been dealt three severe blows already: the one in El Jícaro-Las Vueltas, in Chalatenango, and the ones in Perquín and Corinto and Morazán, with the loss of three Army companies. Our plan, in concrete, was to confront the Army with these alternatives: either they would give up terrain because they decided not to mobilize and we would continue occupying positions and extending our zone of control, or they would mobilize, in which case our plan was to achieve the annihilation of major units.

What did the Army choose? At first, they opted to give up terrain, abandoning territory that for us offered greater areas of maneuverability to solve the supply problem. Now, in the process of occupying six towns and in the ambush on the Corinto-Sociedad highway, on November 8 in Morazán, we have annihilated and captured the weapons of two companies and have disarticulated and put out of combat other two. We practically put an entire battalion out of commission in a month. Prior to this, they could maintain a broad encirclement around our zones of control to impede the arrival of supplies in order to weaken our social support base. Now that option was eliminated, as our theater of operations and zones of control have extended.

The October campaign in Morazán began with the encirclement of more than 100 soldiers in an important location and the occupation of three towns practically at the same time. The towns of Torola and San Fernando were taken in the first hours of combat, and the Army's positions at Perquín were surrounded, ending with the occupation of the town and surrender of the majority of the forces there, including the captain in charge of the company.

This presented the Army with a situation which theoretically obliged them to make a strategic move. However, the Army did not, so we searched for other targets: the occupation of the town of Carolina, in the northern part of San Miguel. This added to the quantity of terrain at our disposal, and now practically the northern part of the Department which

borders Honduras was in our hands. On November 18, on Corinto-Sociedad highway, our forces annihilated another enemy company which was heading towards Corinto as reinforcements. Nearly 100 arms and some military vehicles were captured, and 62 prisoners, including two officers, were taken. Later, our forces occupied Corinto.

The eastern part of the country was practically paralyzed economically since the start of the campaign, without transport or electrical power. Fuel was scarce since we had destroyed over a dozen fuel trucks. Water was rationed. The railroad was paralyzed due to our sabotage of the bridges and engines. All these facts will have an effect on the cotton and coffee harvests.

In the central zone there were four Departments affected to a greater degree by our sabotage of power lines: San Vicente, Cabañas, Cuscatlán, and Chalatenango. The Troncal del Norte highway was also closed down because of our constant sabotage.

In the western part of the country we managed to partially close down the transportation system, by destroying railroad cars, buses and trucks loaded with coffee. Electrical power was also starting to be affected in the west. Commercial transportation from Guatemala was paralyzed by our sabotage actions. By prolonging and sustaining this situation, and by continuing with our military operations, we put the Army in a difficult position. During the course of the campaign we carried out actions that reinforce the enemy's awareness that they must concentrate on defending strategic positions. One such example was our attack against the oil refinery located in what was presumed to be their safest territory, the western area, their deep rearguard, where the revolutionary movement, because of the terror campaign, had been forced to scale down its activity. We attacked the refinery with several Chinese RPG-2 rockets, producing "considerable damage," as was recognized by the government itself, forcing a reduction in their output and in the distribution of fuel to the rest of the country.

That attack, our actions along the highways, and our sabotage in the capital city, forced the Army to dilute its concentration of forces. The elite units were used to control

roads and highways, while the Army continues to lose its remaining positions in our rearguard zones. By now we had taken over six population centers in Morazán and three in Chalatenango, aside from the 19 towns that the Army abandoned already, but that we had not occupied. We were now in control of vast new areas, which is also a great improvement.

Another element, aside from the conquest of new terrain, was the decline in the Army's morale. It is reflected in two facts: First, there are more prisoners taken than killed or wounded soldiers. Their troops now have a marked tendency to surrender. They prefer not to fight in order to save their lives. Another proof of their demoralization was that they refused to move. This was not the result of a military option in favor of defensive tactics; it reflects lack of morale, fear that the troops may be disarticulated or annihilated. Another element of the same phenomenon was that increasingly they were talking about operations that simply do not exist, or operations that militarily did not make any sense.

### ***U.S. View of the 1983-84 Guerrilla Situation***

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—I arrived on the first of September, 1983, and three days after that, the last major guerrilla-sustained offensive was launched with an attack that did fairly heavy damage in San Miguel, in the east. That was followed up in a three-month period with roughly 85 separate guerrilla attacks of varying magnitudes but all significant enough to be worth reporting. A large share of them were partially or fully successful even from the Embassy's viewpoint. They may have had a 60, 70, or 80 percent success rate in that they did significant damage to army units caught off guard, perhaps managed to kill or wound a large number of government individuals, and were able to take over towns for a period of time.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.



It was, in a military sense, a low point in military activities and operations. We had just begun to train people in Honduras. We had just begun to pull together for the umpteenth time an effort to coordinate political-military and economic development activity. It's something that we still probably need to do more work on to achieve real success. It's something which the government resisted.

The main lesson coming out of that attack sequence is that its success was really heavily on the military side and heavily on the intelligence side. There were days at the end of 1983 when we wondered whether we would make it through the next two or three months because of that offensive and where things were taking us, and we were beginning to stare an election process in the eye. One can well characterize my two years, more or less, as the nadir of political-military activities, and all the consequences—political and economic negative effects—were being widely felt in the country.

**Colonel James J. Steele**—The guerrillas launched a "final offensive" in early 1981, and they almost pulled it off. Really, the guerrillas maintained the initiative even after that. You can argue at what point the government forces gained the initiative, and so on. But certainly, even into 1983 and early 1984 the guerrillas were operating with a considerable amount of strength. They were operating in large units almost in a conventional mode at times. They were operating in 100-man columns or more and confronting the Army consistently.

By late 1983 we saw some fairly significant reorganizational changes within the military establishment. We saw a considerably increased level of U.S. assistance and reorganization of the general staff. There were, however, some major guerrilla successes which extended right up into 1984. They destroyed the bridges across the Lempa, the 15 September bridge in particular. They captured the 4th Brigade headquarters in El Paraíso on New Years of 1984, and so on. What we saw

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

after that was a situation where the government forces were obviously getting better; the Air Force was particularly effective, and the guerrillas saw their prospects for a quick victory beginning to fade. They saw the political situation in the country changing.

After the presidential elections in early 1984, principally to survive, the guerrillas initiated and implemented a major change in strategy in mid-1984. President Duarte took office in June 1984. Even though there were some major attacks after he took office—a major dam complex in late June of 1984, and attacks in areas like Suchitoto—the guerrillas had essentially taken a step back in terms of classic insurgency stages and had gone to smaller units, dispersed, with less confrontation with government forces, and so on. At the same time, the insurgency began to lose its people. There were a lot of defectors after Duarte was elected. June of 1984 was a fairly large month for deserters. The guerrilla movement was obviously having some problems trying to hold itself together politically, but it would be wrong to say that it was defeated. It still numbered between perhaps 9,000 and 11,000 armed insurgents at that time.

### ***The Guerrilla Situation in the Fall of 1983***

**Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial")**—They [these defeats] have led to a realization among the high echelons of the Army and their Yankee advisers that strategically the Army has been steadily losing its capability of destroying its enemy—the popular forces. Not because it is weaker than before, but because the guerrillas are getting stronger.

Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"), primary leader of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), one of the organizations that make up the FMLN, until his death in 1983. Interview by Adolfo Gilly originally published in Mexico on 4 and 5 January 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 51. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

**Joaquín Villalobos**—We have achieved a strategic accumulation of victories which will be expressed in a final culminating moment. But because of the characteristics of our situation, because of the decrease in the insurrection potential—especially of the urban masses—the offensive cannot be maintained in an ever ascending spiral, as occurred in Nicaragua in the last 6-8 months of the war. In Nicaragua I would say that at times the masses themselves got ahead of military actions. In other words, the Sandinista Front made the determination to take a neighborhood between today and tomorrow and as the hours passed in that time slot the masses took that neighborhood, and the military units would arrive to secure it. But that was a different situation from what our's has been.

The Army can continue to act, to harass our positions, but without achieving any military result. And what does this signify? That we are clearly going to begin to resolve the supply problems and we are going to resolve them in two ways: by a generalization of mass support for the revolutionary army and because the increased terrain gives greater possibilities. The annihilation of Army units provides arms, ammunition, and logistics, and the arms allow us to incorporate new fighters from the masses. In other words, other factors appear. And what does this imply? It implies an ascending spiral in which the continuity of operations will be constant and no vacuums will be produced.

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 86-98. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

## ***The Military Situation from the Fall of 1983 to the Turning Point***

**Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III**—Frankly, you could just see things start to slow down after Agostinas [vacation period] was over. Everybody said we operated like hell during Agostinas and said, "Okay Americans, we did it for you. Now we have to take a break," and in fact they did. Then, in September [1984] they [the insurgents] hit San Miguel. I had a 50-yard line seat and watched the whole thing. They also hit all the way around the base of Cocawatiki, and it was rather an interesting day for me. Really, the first time I got a chance to see what was going on.

Right down at the bottom of the hill about 20 clicks [kilometers] you could see this thing going on at San Miguel, and that was extraordinary. They dropped those three bridges with charges; that wasn't José Sievo with his little handy-dandy rucksack on those charges—they were big. I could feel the impact. That was the overmanifestation of what was going to be a dramatic and total defeat for the Salvadoran military. The insurgents were going to make it dramatic and did that in San Miguel. The attack had a devastating psychological impact. They had to do it and they did it.

The third factor in this thing was us, generic term "gringos." The Salvadorans were scared silly. They weren't going to get money to buy more bullets, and they were rationing everything they possibly could, from radio batteries to ammunition to everything else, and of course the scale of operations was dropping off. Equipment was starting to wear out—the old equipment they were using. We didn't have a lot of field equipment and stuff in stock for them anyway, and we went to zero in money at the end of the July. Although we were expecting 25 million dollars and I had a plan to spend it, it wasn't there. Of course when you shut the pipeline off, you know it

Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1983 to 1984, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, PA, 29 May 1985.

takes some time to get the pipeline going again. In effect, they had to operate with what they had already received, and nothing else was going in.

During the month of October, the military situation continued to reverse rapidly. We lost a Cazador battalion trained at RTC [Regional Training Center], and we lost a Salvadoran battalion at Cocawatiki, which had been trained by Salvadorans in-country, although at least one company made a good account of themselves there. This took place over a period of three weeks, and I am talking about "wipe out!" Government losses were extraordinarily high in the October and November time frame. They had quite a psychological impact on the government and the military. As an example, on the Monday morning before Thanksgiving, Manny Granado came to me and said that he thought the Salvadoran Army was in the process of disintegrating. The day before, Sunday afternoon, just south of a little place called Corinto, which is on the Torola River, right up on the Honduran border, there was a company outpost where the subversives drove up in buses like they were going to play soccer, and the lieutenants surrendered the garrison. . . . This was not a local force militia. No, they were a company from a Cazador battalion.

I went over to the Estado Mayor [General Staff Headquarters]. There was a major sitting there, on a beautiful sunshiny Sunday afternoon, myself, and three other gringos. I went to him, and I said, "Hey look, this is not my country, but you guys better get serious about this thing or you are not going to have to worry about me complaining to you much anymore." I said, "I'm going home." I went at that time to see the Ambassador, and early Monday morning I said, "I just want to tell you, Mr. Ambassador, that there are some people, very knowledgeable guys on my staff, that think they are witnessing a general disintegration in process in the armed forces, and I'm not ready to buy off on that yet, but things aren't looking very good." He's an unflappable guy, and he chuckled, and he said, "Well, that's not a real nice way to start Monday morning out. Give me some facts. I've got to know what's going on." I went on what I call my famous barnstorm tour. I started at

Ahuachapán and went all the way to Miagin, an island in the Gulf of Fonseca. I went to every brigade area. I went to every department. I covered them all, and I got very close to what was going on. The day before I ended "Le Grand Tour," significantly, I went again to Watikitu, and this time I was at base. A Cazador battalion was hung-up up there, but this time the insurgents hit them with about 600 people. This was a significant change, subversives going to mass operations—600 folks is a significant number of people. It's always about that number when you get your ass kicked, and they were supported with indirect fire systems. They were willing to eat the significant casualties which they received from the Air Force. In the afternoon it was all over. The Cazador battalion was gone, it disintegrated. One lieutenant hung on up there. This kid hung on up there. Well into the afternoon he ran out of ammunition, and Cruz [the battalion commander] called him up and said, "Don't lose your balls," and the kid came back on the radio—and, I'll never forget it, he said "My balls are fine and intact. I want to keep them that way." He said, "They are not throwing candy at me up here." He got out and I later got a chance to pat him on the back.

In December the Army got two more bad, bloody noses. One was at El Paraíso, which happened right after Christmas. It was a disaster; it was awful. We found out, with the attack on Cocawatiki (near San Miguel) and others, that Villalobos and the other insurgent field commanders were willing to mass large amounts of troops.

Tactical mobility was grossly lacking on the government's side to fight this kind of a war, where you must have some kind of a force multiplier, not just bodies against bodies. The Cazador battalions didn't have staying power. They didn't have any punch, and we didn't have the tactical mobility to respond to the emerging guerrilla tactics. Monterosa, being the field commander, put together the double Cazador battalion, which became the light infantry battalion later on down the road. This new unit, significantly enough, was about the size of one of his company engroupments in the Atlacatl battalion, which had punch and could stay and could wait a while for help to come if they got in deep water.

They had been used to dealing with disparate guerrilla formations of maybe 15 or 20 people or maybe not even that many. All of a sudden, they're running up against a main force, heavily armed with punch. They had to adapt to the tactics of the 600. As a result, the Salvadorans changed their modus operandi. If they hadn't, they would have continued losing major forces.



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## *International Efforts and Sanctuaries Support Insurgents*

### *Explanations in Cuba: 1983—La Habana*

**Miguel Castellanos**—Comandante Humberto Ortega, Minister of Defense of Nicaragua, presented his condolences for the deaths of “Marcial” and “Ana María.” The rest was directed against the imperialists and the Contras. He told us that if the imperialists intervened, we would be corpses because they would have to kill us all. He continued talking about how we were wearing down as a result of our position, and that we should use all our economic resources to defend ourselves against imperialism. A matter I wish to focus on is when he referred to the methods of Sandinista warfare.

We were fighting against the counter-revolutionaries by utilizing the Intelligence Services and the *masas*\* in the cities in

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987. As quoted in *Conversaciones con el Comandante Miguel Castellanos*, edited by Javier Rojas P. (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), pp. 86-88. Copyright 1986 by Editorial Andante. Reprinted by permission of Editorial Andante.

\**Masas* literal translation is masses used with at least two meanings: (1) The noncombatant supporters of the various insurgent groups; (2) The people in general terms.



order to impede the opposition's creation of a social base [referring to the mobilization of the *masas* that they used to prevent the organized actions of the opposition].

Another meeting, which was not scheduled, was held at the residence where Colonel Denis [Chief of Special Operations] and his subordinates were staying. After listening to whatever I had to say about the current state of the war, he pointed out the fact that there were improved conditions for fighting this war, and the most important aspects within the unit were the strategic and tactical operations executed by the General Commandance of the FMLN. I explained to him that when Dr. Ungo—of the FDR—was in Managua, he expressed his disagreement with respect to the transferring of the Commandance in El Salvador because now, a meeting between the seven (five from the FMLN and two from the FDR), would no longer work. But Colonel Denis told me emphatically that the FDR's involvement in the war was not important, and they'd have to search for another solution.

We met with the Soviet and Vietnamese Ambassadors in their respective embassies. The former was rather pleased with the information I provided him with. He told me that he was following the war in El Salvador very closely and that the advances made by the united front were very significant. He promised me that upon my arrival in Moscow, I would be received by a very prominent leader of the Party so I could deliver the information to him personally. It was more or less the same with the Vietnamese; although when he expressed his sympathies for "Ana María" and "Marcial," he was more effusive when referring to the latter. Later we talked about Salvador. He commented that during the past years, the FMLN had demonstrated an historical advance, and as a representative of Vietnam, he was willing to offer all of his political solidarity. He also promised to pursue my request for a special meeting so I could expose in more detail the information regarding "Marcial" and "Ana María."

The meeting held with the political attachés of the respective accredited embassies in Cuba was very similar. The representatives from the Democratic Republic of Germany,

Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Hungary were there. Their greatest fear was that, while the war in El Salvador continued to advance and favor the FMLN, the more likely it was that the U.S. would intervene with its combat troops. They asked me how we foresaw the situation and I told them that, like in Vietnam, we had to first, prevent the intervention, and later destroy the aggressive attitude of imperialism.

### ***FMLN Efforts Enjoy Great Support in All Parts of the World***

**Guillermo M. Ungo**—FDR-FMLN efforts have received the deepest international support from a broad range of countries in both the capitalist and the socialist worlds—from Cuba, France, Mexico, Nicaragua, Sweden, and Third World countries. The FDR-FMLN is not a social democratic movement seeking assistance only from the Socialist International, nor a communist movement seeking support only from Cuba. The FDR-FMLN has sought broad-based support to guarantee its nationalist and nonaligned position. The FDR-FMLN understands very well that to reconstruct El Salvador, aid from many sources will be required, especially from the Western world. FDR-FMLN nonalignment is, consequently, a position of principle, of necessity, and of political convenience. The FDR-FMLN wants to have friends, not enemies or masters.

The struggle for democracy in El Salvador enjoys great popular support in all parts of the world. Even in the United States important sectors of the population have a better understanding of the situation of the Salvadoran people and the reason for their political and armed struggle than does the U.S. Government. It is the people of many countries and not their governments who actively support the guerrillas and provide material aid such as money, medicine, and clothing.

Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (political leader of the FPL), "The People's Struggle," *Foreign Policy* 52 (Fall 1983), pp. 54, 59. Copyright 1983 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Reprinted by permission of *Foreign Policy*.

## ***Unconditional Support without Accounting***

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—Their [insurgents] blatant disregard for honor and the law gives them a greater advantage in this struggle. They are fighting a clandestine war. They don't have to account for their actions to anyone, especially where violations of human rights are concerned. The tremendous support received from Russia and other members of the Soviet bloc—Vietnam, Lybia, East Germany, Cuba—is unconditional. They must simply continue to struggle to win the war. Their ultimate goal in this struggle is to obtain power, no matter what the costs.

Joaquín Villalobos states that either there is a nation for all or no nation at all. His goal is to obtain power and destroy what is left of our economic infrastructure. Then, they don't have to account for their actions; they are guerrillas. I call them terrorists. Since most of their ideology focuses on international proletarianism, the support from the Soviet bloc countries is tremendous. All of these countries are obligated to help one another.

The Sandinista revolution is a revolution without a frontier, and the revolutionaries from Honduras and El Salvador must support Nicaragua. That is one advantage. However, we've had to prove to the world that our position is defensive and that our struggle is legal and in accordance with all of the principles and regulations for fighting a war. From the standpoint of the humanitarian aspects, we are being supervised by international entities such as the International Red Cross, the Commission for Human Rights, the United Nations, the U.S. Congress, the Senate, the Democrats, everybody. On the other hand, nobody supervises them. Their system of war pivots on destruction, violation of human rights, and subjugation of the people. It is a clandestine war.

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

We have to wear our uniforms and submit the terrorist to a legal, official investigative process. They, on the other hand, do not have to do this. They take advantage of the people's situation and appeal to their need for food, medicines, jobs, and a roof over their heads. Since the guerrilla does not wear a uniform and can easily infiltrate into the crowds, we are unable to identify him. That is another advantage they have.

### ***The Fundamental Concept of Sanctuaries***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—The concept of sanctuary is fundamental. Every insurgent movement needs a rear guard that provides logistics, human resources, moral support, and propaganda, and without this rear guard the insurgents could not survive. For example, when someone asks me, "When is the problem in El Salvador going to end?" I ask, "When is the problem in Nicaragua going to end?" While there exists a Marxist Nicaragua we are going to have problems, unless we grow in such a way and we turn into such a powerful country that Nicaragua could not then intervene. I believe that sanctuary is a resource which has always been provided. What happened in South Vietnam was due to North Vietnam. Every successful insurgent group has a committed source of supplies and/or sanctuary. Even Cuba received aid from the United States, from Mexico, and other places.

The Sandinistas were successful because they received aid from Costa Rica and Cuba. Costa Rica played a vital role in the establishment of the Sandinistas in Central America. They allowed arms, ammunition, and people to be smuggled through the borders into Nicaragua. They also allowed Cuban airplanes carrying weapons and other equipment to land in their airports. Therefore the organization and presence of a sanctuary is fundamental for a subversive activity.

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.



DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY, INTER-AMERICAN GEODETIC SURVEY, PANAMA

It is very difficult for a subversive activity to take place without the support of a sanctuary. Take Colombia, for example. What they do in Colombia is only accomplished because they do it through Panama. The subversives that were captured trying to enter through Ecuador declared they were coming from Cuba. That is to say that no spontaneous generation of a subversive activity really exists. There must always be a country that is willing to provide support, train, and unite and willing to develop an extraordinary effort in order to maintain the subversive activities in other countries.

### ***Sanctuaries ("The Bolsones")***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—There are four places guerrillas get the wherewithal to fight, and outside sponsorship is only one way. You get it from contributions from the people, or you grow it or make it yourself. You capture it, or you get it from the outside. What they are getting from the people in most cases is not done freely, with the exception of the areas called the "Bolsones" up on the border. There they've had time to develop an infrastructure and some popular support.

### ***Our Neighbors Do Not Have Our Problems***

**Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya**—Their [guerrilla] commands are very effective. The subversion has managed to take geographical positions in our country which they consider to be propitious for their armed struggle—military struggle. An example of this can be seen in the northern zone of the Departments of Morazán and Chalatenango, which share

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987.

border lines with a friendly country such as Honduras. They are also taking over the western side which borders along Guatemala, with the objective of controlling the contested border zones that serve as sanctuaries.

When we are operating on one side and our neighbor, who has no intentions of getting into trouble, allows them to come and go through the zones as they please, it gives them a greater advantage just by being there. But when we are in a difficult situation, for example, and we try to engage the enemy, he is able to withdraw and go to his sanctuary on the other side where it will be very difficult for the authorities to trespass.

Our neighbors do not have our problem to contend with and thus do not give much interest to this type of war, which must be fought along with all the other countries that, one way or the other, are involved in the problem. That is what happens with both Guatemala and Honduras. The subversives chose the border line with the objective of always having a place where they can recover and rest and a place where they can heal their wounded and a place where they can easily obtain aid from other countries.

### ***Different Types of Sanctuaries***

***Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila***—The sanctuaries are the base of operations. They are the safest place where the insurgent can retire when tired, when wounded, when in need of retraining. They are also areas where the insurgents receive logistics supplies, where the logistics bases are located, where new equipment and ammunition and weapons can be stored for further distribution.

There are three kinds of sanctuaries. There is a sanctuary in Nicaragua where the commanding headquarters of the FMLN are located—the Radio Venceremos, which is a means for propagandizing the psychological war against our armed forces.

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

and the general headquarters where Nicaraguan and Cuban forces are directing the internal operations of terrorist forces in El Salvador and where all of the logistics support program is located. There are also other training centers in Nicaragua, ideological training centers and logistics bases to support other efforts.

The second sanctuary is Mexico. This is a sanctuary in which a democratic government (Mexico) offers its territory to a political group so this group can then attack another democratic government. This is a political sanctuary. We are not quite sure; however, we suspect that Mexico provides economic aid to this political group, and not only does it offer them its territory, but also it provides all other means which the government has. They have, for example, the Mexican government's means of communications, used against El Salvador's government. This is favorable to the FMLN. They [Mexicans] are in favor of the FMLN and against our government. The newspapers, the television, the magazines are all against us. The same thing occurs with the intellectual structures—the universities. They allow them to utilize public squares or plazas, which are internal but nevertheless important enough, to allow them to divulge their own goals, their own objectives, in order to convince the world that they are good people. They also utilize this territory in order to assemble the foreign press and have their personal articles (*communiqués*) published throughout the world. This is another sanctuary.

The third sanctuary is that of the refugee camps. We have refugee camps in Honduras. We have three refugee camps of 30,000 Salvadorans who, in the beginning, were stationed close to the border but now are only 30 kilometers from the center of Honduras. These refugee camps are supported by the United Nations. It does not cost them anything to remain there. There are the families of the ones who are impressed into the terrorist organizations. They have schools, doctors, jobs, free food; they are safe. Nothing happens to them. The terrorists cross the border to visit their families. They take the wounded, sick, tired to rehabilitation centers in order to regain their strength and afterwards return to this place. A lot of times, the food that is



distributed among the refugees in the camps often reaches the terrorist forces when they are not able to feed themselves by their own means.

There is another sanctuary, which is a specific case, between El Salvador and Honduras. That is the problem of never having been able to define the border lines between these two countries. We don't know where El Salvador ends and where Honduras begins. One says it ends here. The other one says it begins there. This area is defined as a *bolsón*. In these areas both governments have agreed to not interfere militarily. Therefore, since the Honduran forces cannot go into these areas, this becomes an ideal place for the refugees to remain. Lately, however, we have been able to make some sort of arrangements with the Hondurans in order to go into these areas and clean them up. But we can't remain there for long. I think that if we are able to solve the border-line problems with Honduras, we will be able to solve even greater ones. This is fundamental.

The sanctuaries have always been support bases for the insurgents from where they can maintain their activities in other countries, in other territories, or with other democratic governments. Remember that France is a sanctuary for Khomeini. France was the one which precisely provided all the facilities for Khomeini to overthrow the Shah of Iran. He was able to do it from there. It is not necessary to be on the other side of the border. He can be, for that matter, on the other side of the planet. But if he does have the means and support for this, he can be successful in destabilizing and attacking another government or another nation.

### ***Vietnam Lesson: Take the War to the U.S. Congress***

**Miguel Castellanos**—After the history involving the French, the subject of U.S. involvement is discussed. You can see how they also manipulate international politics, because in the beginning it was the Chinese who helped them. After, came the

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987.

issue of World War II against the Japanese, and how they allied with each other. In addition, the U.S. helped them at one time, but after that was over they returned to the attack. The agreements of 1954-55 that divided North Vietnam from South Vietnam stipulated that the government of South Vietnam was to hold elections, and they never did. Then, they decided to create guerrilla forces to fight in Vietnam. Then, the French withdrew, and in came the U.S. to help. There began a struggle against what they referred to as a puppet regime, and the U.S. You gradually begin to see how the U.S. becomes involved and increases their force, and they themselves begin to increase and develop. You can see very well how they developed their tactic. For example, at the operative level, which is referred to as the "Leopard Skin," consists of not giving a dividing line between the enemy and them. In all regular wars there is a dividing line. Well, here are the allied forces. In a guerrilla war there are none. Then, Leopard Skin consisted of spotting the entire territory. That is why it's called Leopard Skin; conflicts of the type in which the enemy is not able to go in one principal direction. Well, the same way it's done here. The other is being able to utilize the types of forces—the zonal guerrilla lines that are located in one zone, and the regular lines, which are the mobile strategic forces, the popular militias. They also have a large role to get support from the people with their insurrections. That is, for them victory consists of knowing how to combine decisive blows with popular insurrections, consolidating territory. That is what is referred to as a variant, even though they don't accept it. After, one sees it as a variant of a prolonged people's war. That is what they are applying now. They also have another advantage. They created the Ho Chi Minh trail, which maintained a constant logistical flow during the entire war, and it never ended. They said that the Ho Chi Minh trail was an umbilical cord for them. Without it, the war would have been lost and the support of the people along with it. That's why I've never done those two things. And the creation of the constant units. In that way they continued to advance until 1975, the year in which Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City was taken. They also have a mock-up in a large room showing the entire city. They explained that attack with small tanks. "There goes the first direction, the

other direction, here is how they attacked, and the U.S. Ambassador fled in a helicopter.”

In addition, at the end of the course, the Vice-Minister of Defense came to lecture us on the subject of the struggle against imperialism because they considered it to be very important for us, because we were going through the same situation back then. Then, how to attack imperialism, politically. The psychological war, because they said, “... well, imperialism, those who employ psychological warfare, superpower, that it is a great power...” But they demoralized the Marines completely. Then, they said, “... we have to bleed the North American Army as much as possible and do a lot of propaganda.” Another issue was to take the struggle to the U.S. Not only take it to the country, but at the political level, take it to the Congress. Then, they explained all of the mobilization of masses that took place in the U.S., they were involved in large part. Of course with the support of the Socialist bloc, because they do have one thing; that when the Socialist bloc supports a movement on all sides it is constant, but more at the political level. And that’s what happens in the U.S. In other words, it was a total war. Total in the integral sense, a war at the political-military and diplomatic levels. Then, there was a subject that is called the Negotiations Dialogue, which is provided by the *leductor* [sic], or the Second One. The Second One gave us the lecture. They concluded that the dialogue serves to seal a victory, or try to consolidate the advances achieved; but never to make basic concessions. Concessions may be made, but they must not affect what has been won. It should be used to gain time. They teach that very well, and how dialogue is used in the political sense.

### ***The United States Underestimated External Insurgent Support***

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**—The third decision was the one taken in the spring of 1983 after the brief but unexpected and bloody

Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1977 to date, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

takeover by the guerrillas of the city of Berlín. That event really caught many of us in the State Department at least somewhat by surprise. Speaking for myself, I had assumed that once the Americans showed that they were semi-reliable and were prepared to provide security assistance and economic assistance to the government of El Salvador, even after the failure of the 1981 offensive, that this guerrilla movement that had launched it would probably wind up going historically the way of most Latin American guerrilla movements. That is to say, you had your chance, you made your run at power, you lose it, you blow it, you disintegrate, you disappear.

What this perception underestimated was the importance of Nicaragua and of the Cuban-Soviet connection. Namely, the ability to have a safe haven where the defeated can recover. Something to provide external confidence, propaganda, sources of training. I have always thought that we have incorrectly, for public relations reasons (but even there it has been a mistake), overemphasized the role of arms transfers as such. That what is really involved here is the whole political-psychological infrastructure of support that was provided the guerrillas. In any case, instead of fading away, the guerrillas escalated. We found ourselves facing a situation two years later where guerrilla operations were taking place with large concentrations of forces—with units that were able to take on the military in almost conventional set battles, and do them in. So the decision was made then, instead of caving in, to start on a crash project of actually remaking the Salvadoran military. Providing the kind of training to the officer corps that would enable them to really absorb significant amounts of new aid and to take on the guerrillas, whose military strength was in their cadres. Perhaps if we'd been a little less overconfident before, and less trapped by traditional visions of U.S.-Latin American relations, we should have done this back in '81.

Now, all of these developments took place within the framework of the support for democratic processes. At no point did we stop making clear to the military that we thought that their institutional structure needed to be depersonalized and organized in such a way to be able to provide effective loyalty

to the government and to its political leadership. When Secretary Shultz visited El Salvador, the point he made to the presidential candidates (including retired Major D'Aubuisson, who was present at the lunch) was that we could be neutral as to the individual candidates and the parties involved in a democratic process but that we could not be neutral about the process itself. This point has been thoroughly ingrained in the Salvadoran military.

The last time I was in El Salvador in September of 1986, I remember, at a dinner, a collection of military officers asking whether our ban on military officers as presidents extended even to a military man who might be smart enough to get himself elected president. To which I responded (by the way, as a citizen of the country that elected Dwight Eisenhower) that I didn't think that I could answer that in any other way but, yes, no officer could be elected president without creating grave problems within the United States. But, I added, the real issue is the political process in which the elections take place.



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## *Major Government and Political Actions*

### *Reforms—A Dynamic in the Salvadoran Equation*

THE EDITORS—By late 1981, after two years of insurgent ascendancy, the military in El Salvador knew that basic internal alliances would have to change. The military, as much for institutional survival as for any other reason, had successfully staged the '79 coup. The military's coup proclamation stated that basic reforms were the reasons for the coup. Once in power, having begun the implementation of the agrarian, banking, and foreign trade reforms, it became obvious that another more fundamental reform was needed. Having irreparably ruptured its ties with the oligarchy, the military's political role, as the praetorian guard for that sector of the society, no longer provided the philosophical base for the institution's survival.

The military was protecting something from the insurgents. This something became the new political system which was adopted by the Constituent Assembly. The change in the military attitude and the demonstrated support for the new political system, with the military subordinate to that system, may have been the most significant reform. It signalled a very

fundamental change in terms of professional ethics and purpose for the military as an institution in Latin American politics.

### *An Underlying Problem*

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—The problem was a great dislocation of population. A loss in production through everything from land reform to guerrilla activities. A tremendous growth in urban sprawl and an inability of the government to keep up in education and social welfare and health. You had a very poor political-economic situation to begin with, one that was made worse by the war. Part of the guerrilla strategy was, in a sense, to try to take advantage of and capitalize upon the attacks against the government and government areas as a way of perhaps reinforcing the notion that they, not the government, could provide an end to the economic and social hardships that the people felt. So it was a very, very difficult situation, and I don't feel we ever really got a firm hand on it.

We were able to deal with refugees and the immediate problems but had very few long-term solutions. We were able gradually to get people to begin to work to try to make the reform a success, but the big co-ops created as a result of the reforms suffered from all the problems of people unused to real management having to deal with enormous responsibilities. The better part of the reform was the fact that small holders and small farmers who were tenants on the land began to have ownership, and as a result their skills were much more attuned to success. As a result they could apply what they knew on an individual basis to making this a success.

In a macro sense when I was there, coffee, cotton, and sugar were the main export crops, and each one of them was going through very hard times internationally so world prices weren't too helpful. After I left, while cotton and sugar

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

continued to be very depressed, coffee picked up for a while and gave them some additional breathing space in terms of income, but it is a country not endowed with too many great natural assets and a tremendous number of difficulties.

We were all looking at alternative crops when we were there. Developing them takes a long time, but we had, for instance, people growing melons for export to the United States or beginning to look at citrus as an alternative crop or beginning to look at some more exotic crops, certain nuts and that kind of thing, that might have higher value and could be grown. They all required special skills, and they all required a change in ways of agriculture. They all required market development. You have to address all the problems at one time. But they were questions that were certainly being looked at and were worthwhile to look at. I don't think coffee can ever be replaced.

We had all seen growth in light industry in the seventies under better times. People were looking at assembly industries in which the hand labor that was so plentiful and labor discipline which was generally pretty good and could be adapted, in order to produce for United States and other markets under some of the deplorable trade arrangements to countries like El Salvador, such as GSP and the CBI. But all of that takes time. It takes a lot of security and a certain amount of confidence, and it was moving slowly.

## ***Reforms in General***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—In 1979 the military finally realized that things were coming apart. That the country had gotten so polarized that things had to change. They took the big step and threw out Romero and initiated the reforms. The land reform was the military's idea. The military brought Duarte out of exile. They came to the realization that they had to change the way they were doing things. Not the same players, but the same outfit. They had come a long way. Majano and others became infected by political realism and survival.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.



There are people in the military who are not necessarily enamored with reform but who realize they don't have any choice. There are others who fought it tooth and nail and were allied with the ultra-Right, but they are a muted minority now. Whereas a few years ago when they were the majority—it was different. Majano and followers did what they did out of their own self-interest, their own view of what Salvador could take and what it couldn't take and what needed to be done to save the country and incidentally save the military. If you talked to General Blandón, now Chief of Staff, you would realize that these guys knew that things had to give. Now, they are in the process of trying to clean up their own outfit—clean up the Army—they have a long way to go, but they've already come a long way. In '82 nobody would have given any chance at all for El Salvador. Guerrillas were at the gate. They were sure winners. All reporting was "The Guerrillas are on the roll." Then all of a sudden the first glimmer appeared that democracy might make it; it might survive.

### ***The Basic Reforms***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—It was then in 1980 (9 January or 9 February) when we finally established the fundamental reforms as a result of the new revolutionary government. The armed forces were determined to accomplish this because we knew how important these reforms were in order to win the war. We already had some foresight as to what was going to happen in El Salvador. If we did not have the intelligence and the determination to take these measures then we were not going to be able to control the social revolution that was yet to come. Conditions were established very objectively. The Marxist sectors had gained the National University, and student organizations at the high school level had been created. The insurgents had gained partial support from the Catholic

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

church, with Archbishop Romero as its leader. It criticized openly and was willing to support all of their (Marxist) movements.

There was no alternative other than to proceed immediately in establishing substantial reforms. We established the agrarian reform, the banking reform, and the foreign trade reform in March-April 1980. With those reforms we were able to calm the masses' desire to throw themselves into the streets and support the subversion. Since then, we have continued working on implementation. There were new jobs, new attitudes, new changes. We had to establish programs which pleased the people without neglecting the military. Since then we have been trying to walk alongside the people, and fortunately we have succeeded.

The first reform that was fulfilled in El Salvador was agrarian. This was a condition imposed practically on the military sector by the Christian Democratic party when they constituted the second revolutionary Junta. In '75-'76, under President Molina's administration, the first agrarian transformation project was established in El Salvador for the eastern part of the country. But a stronger, more powerful economic force interceded, made up the Frente Agrícola de la Región Oriental, FARO [Agricultural Front of the Eastern Region].

Through the various means of support, generated in all the economic sectors of the country, the FARO was able to paralyze the effort, and the government was not able to fulfill the reform. This new organization [FARO] introduced law reforms, and with these law reforms they were able to nullify the agrarian transformation project. They said they were not against the reform. What they opposed was the way it was to be fulfilled. They claimed there were other ways to accomplish this, and they were offering alternatives to do so. But we didn't know what these alternatives were.

In 1980 the reforms had to be implemented immediately. In spite of the fact that the Marxist sectors had promised the people would succeed and that they were only two months away from gaining the power, they did not have the will to do this.

The Christian Democratic party put these reforms into effect immediately. They did it with the support of the armed forces. We had to go to all of the farms, all of the ranches, all of the agricultural centers with more than 500 hectares and confiscate them militarily. There were almost 300 properties in San Salvador which were confiscated, and between the farms and the ranches, cooperatives were formed and were turned over to the employees. The armed forces actively participated in the project for agrarian transformation. Without the armed forces' cooperation, this effort would never have been fulfilled.

We had two parts to the reform—one part which included the great stretches of land, properties ranging from 500 hectares, and the other part, those of five hectares or less. There was a huge group of owners here in the center that had not been affected. A deal was made in the Assembly, and it was determined that only 150 hectares would remain under ownership of the person. The properties wouldn't be given to them until 20 December, and therefore they had four days to sell any land they could in excess of 150 hectares. They had to sell anything in excess of 150 hectares because they were only allowed that amount. At this time, all of the agriculturists, landowners, were in the process of either selling or getting rid of the excess land which had already been determined by the constitution. That was the agrarian transformation project.

The third aspect of the agrarian reform concerned properties ranging over 200 hectares and those small properties which are leased to the settlers, the contractors, to the *campesinos* so they can work the land. I worked with that law (it was called the 207th Decree), which was enacted in 1982 and through which all those properties over five hectares were being leased. They were leased to another person, and later on that person could claim it as his property because evidently, if he leased it, it meant that he needed it. We said we were going to leave it with that person who was going to work the land and who could work it.

Initially the project was successful in the implementation. It has been supported economically. There is an organization called ISTA which manages and controls all of this. But

unfortunately, and this is something we are correcting, the farmers, the *campesinos*, and the settlers were not really prepared to become proprietors. They had no credit. They had no access to the credit institutions. They had no sense of direction, planning, agricultural capabilities, or agricultural knowledge. All they know is how to handle a tractor or maybe just sow for that matter. But they don't know which is the best seed, the best land. All of that has been a negative factor in the process of the agrarian reform but is slowly being improved. The most important thing is that we have realized what the problem is and that we are taking certain measures in order to accomplish the goals we set out for.

With respect to the banking reform—since 1930 the large economic sectors in this country began to organize banks. Banking is one of the best businesses there is. I recommend you start a bank. The banks then began to make fabulous deals, such as the following: The Central Bank, which is the bank of the state, would give the economic sectors large sums of money so they would be able to borrow. These sectors would then receive the money at a 2 or 3 percent interest rate and would then place it at 8 to 10 percent for the people. Just for administering the money they were making a profit of 7 percent or 8 percent. That money would then be distributed among friends and family and then maybe to support a project they were working on. Consequently, someone off the streets who did not have any contacts had no access to anything, never had the opportunity to come to this bank in order to receive a credit. The businessmen-agriculturalists would borrow among themselves and would inevitably benefit enormously from these transactions because they would receive it at the fixed rate of 2 or 3 percent. There was a financial structure created by them which made them the sole beneficiaries of the Central Bank.

The Central Bank was not serving the needs of the people for which it had been created in the first place. That had to come to a stop. We then determined we were going to nationalize the banking system. That is, the state is now the major owner of the banks, controlling 51 percent. Individuals can own 25 percent, and the other 24 percent is owned by the

employees of the bank. In relation to the success with the banking reform, we cannot talk about success or failure because, in spite of the fact that the banks have apparently increased in size and assets, that is also a result of the inflation.

In El Salvador inflation was traditionally at a minimum, but unfortunately since 1979 this has increased tremendously, which has left us at a 5 to 1 ratio with the dollar. But also the cost of living is a lot higher because what used to be worth one colon is now worth five. What used to be 2, now is 10. The cost of living is 10 times what it was then. We cannot then say that because of this abnormal situation in which we have lived—of uncertainty, of violence, of insecurity—that it has been a suitable environment for economic growth in the country. For that matter we cannot judge whether the banks are good, bad, or average. I think the banking system has continued to function, and, even if it has not improved considerably, at least it has not worsened.

With respect to foreign trade we also have to point out that this reform was necessary. In the past, the major product of El Salvador, coffee, the foreign trade was in the hands of only five traders. They were the only ones who could export overseas. These people monopolized prices and of course the State's income. They could declare they had sold so much and would leave the rest in the banks of the United States, Switzerland, or France. They would store their money and then invest it in other businesses overseas. That money would never return to Salvador. Because of this, there was a need to nationalize, to stabilize foreign trade, and that is why the Salvadoran Institute for Coffee was created. Those are the three reforms we have accomplished so far.

Economically, 1979 was the best year we have had. This also provided the opportunity for the country to have higher income. Traditionally, in El Salvador, the percentage of taxes was and still is much lower than in other countries. For example, I think in Spain it had 14 percent, and you (the United States), 20 percent, while we had close to 7 percent. A lot of things had not been recorded, especially the patrimony. The state actually received very little income and therefore was

unable to perform some of its responsibilities. This worsened with the increase in violence because there was not only the need to increase the size of troops of the armed forces, but also to create new structures for the state that could respond to the threat posed by the subversive forces. The diplomatic corps had to be strengthened. The Ministry of Culture and Communications needed strong economic support in order to maintain a permanent internal and external campaign. All of these sectors were new and required constant economic attention.

Unfortunately, since 1979, we have been increasing the state's expenses, public expenses, without requiring an extra effort from the people—any additional sacrifice. That is, we have been maintaining this war with a very small budget.

We never had a budget for a war. This has caused a lot of problems. For example the size of troops has increased five times its original size. In '79 we were 10,000, and now we're 50,000. How are we going to pay them? Where is the money going to come from in order to pay them? In order to deal with this problem we have been reducing percentages of the other ministries in order to gear it towards defense. That is how we've been functioning. But every time income was less because businesses were closing down, there were less jobs available, bridges had been destroyed, the electric company had to invest in order to reconstruct their system, and so forth. Then there comes a moment of frustration and desperation where we realize that our budget is only going to cover expenses through September, but there will be no money to cover expenses in October, November, and December.

We have had to come up with an additional tax which we call a sovereign tax or defense tax in order to acquire the necessary funds and be able to handle the deficit for this year. We have another problem—foreign debt. It is extremely high, especially with our own economic crisis. We couldn't really handle everything. We had to once again resort to taxing, but unfortunately that is where we don't see eye-to-eye with the political sectors. Not so much unable to see eye-to-eye, but they believe that here is where they should take advantage of the situation and weaken the government economically in order to win the next elections.

## ***Land Reform Gave Breathing Space***

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—The government did less with the population than we thought the guerrillas tried to do in the rural areas. But the population was of enormous size to deal with. So it wasn't easy to see a big campaign turning the population around. The population had been more influenced by actions of the past than they were by promises of the present. As a result, for them, the question of what the government was doing was much more important than what the government said. As a result you had to help the government turn itself around in order to get it to do a better job with the people.

The land reform program was very important in popular attitudes. It gave the government the breathing space necessary to survive the '83 military campaign and to go into the electoral process with some sense of confidence that the government could still offer alternatives.

**General José Guillermo García**—Now everybody complains about the reform. They say it was bad. It's not the fact that it was a bad reform, but instead it was not implemented, which is different. If you give a Mercedes-Benz or a Cadillac to a *campesino*, he will only be able to look at it, because he won't know how to drive it. If we don't teach him how to drive it, if we don't teach him that you have to put gasoline in, and not just water, in other words, take care of it, that car will last. But if we only hand it over to him, the first opportunity that comes he will take it over a cliff. Analogously, that is what I consider has happened to the agrarian reform and the other reforms. At that time, they weren't only necessary, they were indispensable.

The people were tired of so many lies and so much fraud, and subversives were about to explode in a guerrilla war, earning support for their efforts and the support of the people. The country was destroyed. What happens is that many people forget, but the circumstances back then were extremely tense.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

General José Guillermo García, Minister of Defense, El Salvador, 1979 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987.

problematical, and decisive. That is how the change came about, and the guerrillas' principal propaganda vehicle was taken away from them. They no longer had anything to offer, so we took away their support, and we began to improve our own image in the eyes of the people.

### ***The Most Significant Political-Civil-Military Reform of the Decade***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—The most significant political-civil-military development since the turn of the decade is the demonstrated loyalty of the military to the civilian institution of the presidency—and therefore, to Napoleón Duarte. I placed it in that sequence because the loyalty is definitely to the President, Napoleón Duarte, not to Napoleón Duarte, the President. This can be clearly established by the analysis of the military's political conduct in the intermediate years, and this takes on increased credibility when one acknowledges the earlier relationship of the military with the individual, Napoleón Duarte, and with his party, the Christian Democrats.

If there is any party in Salvador, other than the Communist party, that the military would have difficulty working with, that is the Christian Democratic party, and yet that's the very party they've been working with. The military clearly facilitated, even insisted upon, the Constituent Assembly elections, protected those elections, and ensured freedom of expression. And the Army acted similarly with the first presidential election, the presidential run-off election, and the most recent gubernatorial and congressional elections that took place. All of them were witnessed by the observers from the international community and were universally acknowledged as being conducted openly and honestly. The military, without exception, conducted itself properly in guaranteeing not only the process but the results of the election and respected the results, which have, frankly, not always pleased them.

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.



There are other incidents of perhaps lesser note, which give testimony to the military's commitment to civilian rule and the role of the military in that context. For example, one can look at negotiations leading to the release of the kidnapped daughter of President Duarte. This was a very, very difficult issue for the military in the obvious terms of public security and the expansion of kidnapping attempts against the military and their families. And yet, in spite of these very real dimensions of the issue, the military was absolutely loyal. In this case, to Napoleón Duarte, the individual, President of the Republic. Other factors would be the internal purging of the ultra-rightist, an analysis of the new leadership of the military, and even the steps taken to eliminate human rights abuses. I think all of these incidents give testimony to a fundamental change of attitude within the military.

I would not go so far as to say that there is universality within the military of belief and confidence in the new trends, nor would I argue that all was done in an altruistic spirit. But, the fact is, there have been very significant steps. . . . With the passage of time, some of the true motivation may be lost and placed in a more euphoric or altruistic context as happens historically. It will have its own dynamic influence on the institution and the youth therein and become, I believe, the new ideal motive, merely because of its existence, for others who have been born into that environment. It becomes the natural environment for the institution.

I would caution that all that I have said, about describing this change and attitudes and all, must be placed within the normal context of the role of the military in a Latin society. If one lifts it out and places it in a U.S. or Anglo context, it then loses some, not all. Even by our standards, it is significant. It is not nearly as dramatic in our standards and traditions, but within the Latin context, in which the military has a very legitimate political role, the movement towards our political philosophical status has been incredible in Salvador. I believe, personally, that this trend is substantive. I'll go much further. I think it is permanent.

I believe the rupture with the oligarchy is irreparable and that there is an institutionalized respect for the presidency that

will permit it to endure serious levels of challenge and that it will progress forward. If not to be modeled on the United States, to nevertheless achieve such levels of what we would call maturity as have been achieved, for example, in Colombia and Venezuela. I think the Salvadoran military is well on its way to that level of a political status within the body politic. Moving towards that, they will achieve it.

### ***Resolving the Primary Political Problems in El Salvador***

THE EDITORS—The political problems facing El Salvador were rooted in the traditional form of political system prevalent in much of Latin America. There were two large polarized segments of the society. The landed oligarchy supported by the military and other traditionally oriented power centers, such as the church and banking interests. The other segment was the peasants, the workers, and a large population which were by choice or circumstance not participants in the political process or political power sharing.

There was no middle ground, no large middle class which represented the middle ground, and thus there was little ability to gain consensus. The notion that the political system should foster or openly recognize the democratic necessity of a viable opposition was considered disunifying. As the only real power behind the government, the military found a new institutional mission in the apolitical support of the elections. In order to avoid politicizing the military, and in order to promote the new concept that the military was the protector of the political system, the military was not allowed to vote, to campaign, or voice support for one party or another. The military support of the system allowed for normal elections and campaigns, a circumstance considered extraordinary by many El Salvadorans.

While problems did exist, the military was praised for doing a very creditable job in protecting the

elections, and the insurgents failed to intimidate the voters. The presence of observers and press is also credited with helping to keep the elections honest. The reports and the statements of the press concerning the fairness of the elections provided a tremendous boost to the legitimacy of the El Salvadoran government and served to drown out the insurgent claims that the elections were fraudulent.

### ***The Historical Context of the Political Environment***

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—When we talk about the political environment, let me exclude that element of the population which is supportive of the insurgent movement because it really constitutes a very, very small percentage of the population. Perhaps, to wildly guess at it, 4, 5, 6 percent of the population, at the most, actively supports the insurgency. So, we're talking about well over 90 percent of the population which participated in the democratic process and which was hopeful of finding a political solution in some context other than violence. But within this large substantial majority of the population, over 90 percent of the people, the society is rather strongly polarized.

You have a very strong conservative element which is well to the right of center in our definition of the political spectrum; it includes not only well-to-do business people and landowners but also very close to 50 percent of the rural population consisting of poor *campesinos* in the countryside who are very, very strongly conservative and who traditionally support a strong central government. They respect central authority. All they ask is that they not be abused and that the government make some effort to provide some basic services for them and little else.

Then you have an element, mostly an urban element of workers—people who have a job or are hopeful of having a job

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

but aren't really receiving very much money, aren't living well, that are living on the fringes of society, so to speak. They're just barely getting by. Many of them are unionized workers, and they're very liberal. Their intellectual leaders, in fact, are represented by the Christian Democrats, and they are well to the left of what we consider the political center. They basically believe in a distribution of the national wealth by the government—a centrally controlled redistribution of wealth that includes a redistribution of land, a redistribution of profits among the working class, if you will. And these are the people who now are, in fact, in political power. The problem, of course, in El Salvador is that no matter how you cut the pie there's never enough. There's simply not enough wealth in the country to satisfy the basic needs of the people. But you have here a political polarization. You have a conservative Right, which is very firm in its belief in law and order, in a free market economy, in government noninterference in the private market, and noninterference in most arenas. In fact they favor a government which protects their interests, and so they support a free market economy to the extent that it favors and protects them. They also support the kind of governmental controls and tampering which protect them from competition.

On the Left, you have people who believe that the government should take a much larger role in distributing the goods and services of society. There's really no happy meeting ground in the center. There's only a small place in the center where people of these groups overlap and are philosophically compatible. But you have on either end of the spectrum such a divergence of firm belief and commitment that it's difficult to find a consensus.

Traditionally, in a Latin society, a consensus is what you seek. Traditionally, strong central rule in Latin America means that whoever is in power, whether he came to power through military backing or democratic process or by whatever process, whoever holds power by virtue of the fact that he is in power, determines what the political course of that society will be and obliges the balance of society to support him. He puts all of the people who support him into positions of authority and

influence, denies people who don't agree with him from positions of influence and power, favors those who support him with jobs, favors them in any other possible way so that he can get on about the business of governing according to his concept. The Latins accept this. They understand that they are going to probably have to support, actively support, whoever is in power. With the democracy—with what we have done in supporting the concept of democracy in a pluralistic society—we have almost imposed upon them a system which traditionally hasn't been the way society has worked in Latin America.

### *The Problem*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—The fundamental political problems are based on the fact that a constructive opposition was never given any opportunities and in fact were practically eliminated. This did not allow for different opinions to be considered throughout the government and thus created a lot of frustration. The fact that the official party had all the advantages in order to win created skepticism in the democratic system. There historically was great abstention. I don't know the details, but let's just say that in '82 and '84, 80 percent of the people voted. I'm sure that in former elections 30 percent-40 percent of the people did not vote. There was a total abstinence to voting because the people had lost all faith and confidence in the system. But it seems that that trust has been slowly regained since '82 and '84.

I think the greatest political mistake was to try to eliminate and to exclude the opposition. They should have tried to encourage and help create an opposition in order to establish some sort of balance in the system and the possibility that the differences of opinion between the two parties could somehow be conducive to something constructive. I think that was one of the causes for all these problems. This does not mean I'm referring specifically to what had been said about the fraud

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, Provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.

in elections of 1972, against President Duarte and his Christian Democratic party. It is not that case in particular but, rather, the government's whole attitude towards excluding and ignoring a viable opposition.

### ***The Elections Were the Turning Point***

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—We developed a broad political, economic, and military approach. Of course there was the training effort followed for the military that was absolutely crucial. The Woerner Report gave that emphasis. Some adverse military developments, destruction of most of the Air Force on the ground at Ilopango, brought a response up here. Helped clarify some people's thinking. Politically we worked right from the beginning to overcome the skeptics who didn't believe that you could hold an election in these circumstances. Duarte was the head of the Junta, the political head, and most of the members thought it could be done and should be done. Lots of people in El Salvador and in the United States didn't think it could be done.

So the main effort, politically, culminated in the very extraordinarily successful '82 elections. Those elections were a turning point in history. In one day the impression of most Americans switched. What happened was totally unexpected. Television commentators early in the morning were pooh poohing, but over the course of the day they changed their tone and then in the night were highly positive. It was of major importance for turning the situation around politically. The principal economic problem was just to keep the economy afloat with all kinds of emergency economic help.

The guerrilla-delivered attacks on the electric power system had a particularly serious impact on the economy in many, many ways. It depressed morale of people in the cities. They also affected what industry there was. Coffee mills out of action. We spent a lot of time devising strategy to deal with that

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

and eventually got a very effective strategy. Reasonably effective. You never can totally protect the electrical system. An important part was intelligence. All these things were going on. I can't remember the time, but the decision to bring Salvadorans to the United States for training was an important decision.

### ***The First Free Elections in 50 Years***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—The election was incredible. I was there. I did not believe what I was seeing. All these stories I was told. First the guerrillas said they were going to stop the elections. They were threatening the people. Then everybody said, well people won't turn out. There won't be anybody out there. If they do, the votes won't count. They were all wrong.

### ***The Army Won't Vote***

**General José Guillermo García**—One of the purposes of the October 15th movement was for us to avoid delving in politics. And the irony is that we stopped voting. I gave them elemental reasons for justification. I believe a man who has the power of arms behind him should not be able to have a say in politics because he can make use of the arms in order to make his opinion prevail. That is elemental. But the causes that justified the fact that a man in uniform should not be involved in politics made me insist that a soldier should not vote. We made it legal, and he didn't vote. Certain officers—lieutenants, captains—remind me of that today. I remember they insisted upon one thing. They told me, "Listen, Mr. Minister, the only thing we don't want is to have another . . .," and they'd mention an ex-president's name, who had once been involved in a coup, or a movement, and had taken advantage of the situation in order to declare himself president. "We don't want that." I told them

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

General José Guillermo García, Minister of Defense, El Salvador, 1979 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987.

they had nothing to fear and that they could be sure that wouldn't happen if I had anything to do with it. I wasn't going to take advantage of my responsibility as Minister, create a halo over my head, and all of a sudden declare myself as a candidate, as a politician, taking advantage of the institution in order to achieve personal objectives. I don't do it, and I never did, and they remember that. "We didn't believe you . . .," they'd say, "... but you've convinced us, and you've fulfilled your promise." I told them they were moral commitments. They are commitments of faith one has with himself, because the institution should not serve as a ladder in order to satisfy negative personal hungers for men in uniform. And whoever does so is hurting the institution. Those are principles I stand by. I advise you, I had many opportunities. During the transition of the Junta government to the new transitory government—after the assembly election—they came to me with the offer of becoming the provisional president. I refused. First, because we were under a de facto government, and we all know the power resides, not in the person, but due to the fact of what the armed institution represents. A president can be removed legally on the third day, with a majority assembly. But, I refused. That's when Dr. Alvaro Magaña came in, to whom I have a great deal of respect, a great admiration, and I believe he fulfilled his term in accordance with the circumstances at the time—excellently. A capable, honest, sincere man, he seemed to be the ideal person for the time.

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—Since 1980-81, the purpose for our political project was to establish the ideal conditions to establish or reestablish democracy in El Salvador. With that purpose we continued to work, and in 1982 we had the first free elections in 50 years. At that moment we realized, despite whatever the constitution dictates, that everyone has a right to vote and the duty to vote.

We could not afford to have any high-ranking military personnel vote in these elections. There were several reasons for

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.



doing this. First, if we were to vote, we would have politicized the armed forces. It would have created conditions for the soldier that some would have voted for one party and some for another. We could not afford the luxury to vote because at that time we were in the process of building an institutional unity. We were looking precisely to consolidate the unity that had been fractured because one side had shifted towards the Right and the other side had shifted towards the Left. There was a large sector in the center. We also could not both provide the necessary security during the elections and at the same time be able to vote. We opted for providing the necessary security—some 25,000 to 30,000 of our troops—and fortunately the people responded beautifully. At that moment I recall the subversive forces responded with threats to the people saying, "Vote in the morning and die in the afternoon." They were circulating pamphlets with those threats. That is, if those people participated in the elections, their lives were threatened. But the people paid no attention. Inclusive, there were people who walked 20-25 kilometers from wherever they were to the election centers to cast their ballots. The percentage of voters was approximately 90 percent. No one interfered. This also allowed for some of the elected deputies to get out and proceed to the constitution of a Constituent Assembly and write up a new constitution.

### *The Veracity of the Elections*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—I think that after the experience in 1982 of having presidential and deputy elections, the people, for that reason, were so anxious to participate and cast their vote. Because of that, the elections of '84 were technically better organized. With the experience in '82, the possibilities that there could be fraudulent elections or any other irregularity were avoided. There was a more or less normal political campaign

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, Provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.

with proper elections. That, for us, was extraordinary, but for others living in any other democratic country it was like any other election. I'm sure there was no pressure or influence from any governmental authority or any other kind of help of the parties. It is possible that in a small town, the local authority would have acted as such. But altogether I think they were free elections. This was verified by a great many foreign visitors whom we invited to the elections. We had to have two elections because there was not a majority for the presidency during the first election. We then had two elections and I'm quite satisfied with the outcome. In some cases there were rumors suggesting that help had been provided in favor of the Christian Democrats. From what I know there was no indication of such.

***U.S. Official Observer Delegation***—The official United States delegation to the March 28, 1982 El Salvador Constituent Assembly elections, having personally visited a number of polling areas around the country, believes these elections were fair and free.

One of our members, Dr. Howard Penniman, an elections expert who has participated in some 45 difficult elections, observes that yesterday's election was one of the most massive expressions of popular will he has ever seen.

The tremendous turnout, perhaps over one million, underscores the sense of commitment of the people.

Over and over again we heard the people say, "We are voting for peace and an end to the violence. We believe this election can be a new beginning for this country."

In general the election process itself was orderly and peaceful. The voting procedures adhered to rules established by the Central Elections Commission. There were poll watchers from at least two parties at each table we visited, and the election officials worked seriously at their responsibilities, both in processing the voters and later in counting the ballots. We did see some minor technical problems during the day, but we saw

From the statement by the US Official Observer Delegation to the Elections in El Salvador, 28 March 1982, in *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 36, no. 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 61-62.

no indication of fraud. We believe they had no influence on the outcome of the elections.

Because of the threats of violence during the voting, the Central Elections Commission made the decision to concentrate the polling places in some 300 sites. This did cause some confusion. By the early hours of the morning, there were long lines all over the country. For example in Santa Tecla, a suburb of San Salvador, we estimated that some 10,000 people were standing in line to vote at 9:00 A. M. We were concerned that not all would have a chance to vote. But by the end of the day, election officials assured us that most of the voters were attended to. The Salvadoran people have said in overwhelming numbers that they want peace and an end to the violence.

We hope that the sense of commitment and cooperation that the voters demonstrated yesterday at the polls will be reflected in the efforts of the leadership of the Constituent Assembly that they have elected. The people have asked for a new beginning and they most definitely deserve it.

**Guillermo M. Ungo**—The elections of March, 1982 were held without FDR-FMLN participation because the armed forces—supposedly neutral and charged with guaranteeing impartiality and electoral integrity—publicly declared that, as subversives and terrorists, alliance members were legitimate targets of persecution. A government that violates human rights on a genocidal scale cannot call itself democratic.

Somoza also held electoral events, and El Salvador's history is filled with examples of this type of fraudulent exercise. It must not be forgotten that voting is compulsory in El Salvador and that the regime used all of its propaganda resources to accuse those who would not vote of being subversives.

The truth is that the FDR-FMLN and the Salvadoran people do want free elections, but guaranteeing the security of the political leaders, or even of the FDR-FMLN rank and file, is not enough. The security of all the people must be guaranteed

Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (political leader of the FDR), "The People's Struggle," *Foreign Policy* 52 (Fall 1983), pp. 61-62.



COPREFA

"Yesterday we were misled in our voting. Today we are convinced in our protest. Duarte must go." National Federation of Trade Unions members protest after the 1984 elections.

so that they can participate without fear in an election campaign. To ensure such security, it is necessary to dissolve the death squads, to bring peace, to respect human rights, and to permit the exercise of political and trade-union rights.

### ***Election of Dr. Alvaro Magaña***

***President José Napoleón Duarte***—As soon as the votes for the Constituent Assembly delegates had been counted,

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present), *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 183-85. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

D'Aubuisson\* made the astute move of calling all the parties together and confronting the Junta with the elected power of the assembly. The Junta's role was ended, they said. Within the Junta, we debated whether the assembly was meant to take power from us or simply write the constitution. I thought that only the elected assembly had legitimate power—there was no longer justification for the Junta. The armed forces also opposed any extension of the Junta government. García intended to get rid of the Junta so that he could rule as defense minister in the vacuum. The majority among the officer corps wanted a civilian president because they thought the Junta government had been damaging to military prestige. The struggle then began over who would be the provisional president.

It was a horse race. Dozens of names were entered. . . . The U.S. Embassy, hearing rumors about Carranza and D'Aubuisson, was very worried. The Reagan Administration wanted a moderate civilian in the role of provisional president. The names that were said to have the U.S. Ambassador's blessing included a Christian Democrat, Abraham Rodriguez, Dr. Bustamante of the Election Council, Fortin Magaña of the Democratic Action Party and a banker named Alvaro Magaña Borja, among others.

[There was not a consensus around any military candidate among the officers.] But D'Aubuisson, seeing the disagreement among the military, decided he should take the job himself. Since he had the votes in the Constituent Assembly, it was only a matter of gaining military acquiescence. D'Aubuisson's mistake was overconfidence, I learned. The cocky major went to Gutiérrez to offer him the post of Salvadoran ambassador to Washington. Gutiérrez kept his anger under control, quietly saying he would prefer to stay out. D'Aubuisson, who was drinking at the time, thought Gutiérrez had accepted the job, so he regaled him with all his plans for his Cabinet. The more Gutiérrez knew, the more reasons he had to convince the armed forces that they should not allow D'Aubuisson to take over.

The High Command knew that the United States opposed D'Aubuisson. The Embassy was so concerned about a D'Aubuisson

\*Major (Retired) Roberto D'Aubuisson, ARENA party leader. Former President of the Constituent Assembly. Founder of ARENA's predecessor, The National Broad Front (FAN).



COPREFA

**"The cost of living is too high." Open demonstrations have become commonplace sights in San Salvador. In 1986, members of the Social Security Workers Union staged this protest parade.**

presidency that Washington was asked to send reinforcements to help block this development. President mReagan dispatched General Vernon Walters, his troubleshooting ambassador, who was then involved in trying to end the war between Argentina and Great Britain, which broke out five days after our elections. Walters, a direct man who speaks to Latin military leaders in their own language, works well as Reagan's envoy. But before General Walters could arrive, the High Command decided that the issue of the provisional presidency had to be settled.

There was one unexpected visitor who was brought into the military conclave, the Honduran Army Chief, General Gustavo Alvarez. The Honduran general was officially there to bring congratulations on the elections. But Gutiérrez asked him how the Honduran military had gotten an acceptable president after its Constituent Assembly was elected the year before. Alvarez said they had formed a military committee whose decision was imposed on the parties. Gutiérrez then proposed that the armed

forces back Alvaro Magaña as president. Magaña was viewed as a friend by the military, politically neutral, acceptable to the U.S. Embassy—a good compromise. The entire officer corps was consulted and approved.

By the time Walters reached the meeting of the High Command, their decision to impose Magaña's presidency had already been taken. The officers quickly accepted U.S. advice to do what they had already planned.

### *Magaña's Objectives*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—The most difficult thing that occurred during my tenure as interim president was not having the full cooperation of all the parties. The fact that I had not been elected officially and the circumstances under which I took power did not help my situation. I tried to incorporate these parties into the government. I gave them positions in the Cabinet, three positions to each one of the most important parties. They participated and were responsible for the different areas that they had chosen, but the bottom line was that there was not any kind of cooperation. They knew it was a provisional government, and they were only interested in taking advantage of the situation in order to improve their chances for winning in the next elections.

My job was very difficult. On the other hand, we have always attempted to solve problems in a nondemocratic way. When two parties disagree on something and are not able to meet eye to eye on decisions, we resort to a coup as the most immediate solution. I didn't confront any problems of that nature during my tenure, but nevertheless, I did face many different points of view with the higher echelons of the government with respect to problems such as the one with Colonel Ochoa. Other than that specific situation, there was a general acceptance that it was better for everyone that I be allowed to finish my term as interim president. Everyone

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, Provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.



DONEHOO

**Jorge Shafik Handal, General Secretary, Communist party of El Salvador (standing, second right), one of five FALN commandantes.**

thought they would be the next winning candidate in the upcoming elections. It was very convenient that I be allowed to finish my term so that the new government would have a fresh start with democracy. It was very difficult to develop a large government program, and I was determined to accomplish two things. First, as a fundamental objective, to serve the time it was required for me to complete my term and, second, attempt to do everything possible to make the next elections as free and legitimate as possible and to make the transition to the next government as democratic as possible, through the people's elections.

### ***The Magaña Presidency***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—A key event was the critical role played by the selection of President Magaña as interim

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.



president, which would diffuse the political wrangling, the potential confrontation and total disruption of whatever was going to pass for a government between the ARENA and their allied parties on the Right and the Christian Democrats on the Left. The Army's candidate was Magaña, and I might add, he was also the Embassy's candidate. It gave us a breathing spell between the elections of '82 and the final election that resulted in a Duarte victory. It gave us some time to at least map out a strategy.

It also gave the Army, interestingly, another two years in which to meditate, cogitate, and feel out its new position vis a vis the politicians.

I remember one very heated series of debates in the Assembly in which there were handguns in evidence, a very emotional and very dangerous situation. The situation had arisen between the ARENA delegates and the Christian Democratic delegates.

The bottom line was essentially that the ARENA party was going to bank together with other right-wing parties and oust the Christian Democrats from the Assembly. The Army leadership had a series of one on one talks with various politicians and served notice that the Army was not going to find itself in the position of having guaranteed the elections—protected the electorate and guaranteed the results of those elections—only to have the first tentative steps toward democracy being undone by the politicians in the Assembly. The bottom line from the Army was "Knock it off; we're not going to lose everything because you guys can't make the system work."

So, the whole Magaña interregnum had a function of allowing some very tentative steps into this democratic mine field, some paths to be found. The most important path was the one that the Army, through the political maneuverings of the Right and Left, found itself in the position where it always viewed itself but under slightly different raiment. As the defender of the constitution. It took on the position that rather than intervening to change the government, the Army was going to make sure that the system worked no matter who got elected.



COPREFA

**In 1986 this FPL guerrilla turned himself in. He received a bounty for the weapons and equipment he brought with him.**

During that time, the Army continued a weaning process from the oligarchs and, if you will, a wedding of the Salvadoran military to the U.S. military because of their relationship in the security assistance environment so that it no longer depended upon the favors of the oligarchy for its existence. It had a reason to exist beyond maintaining the status quo, and that was to defeat the guerrillas. And it had tasted a bit of popular support because of its successful role in the elections.

This heady new feeling of camaraderie it established with the population made it much easier for the slow, winnowing out of the undesirable elements of the Mano Blanca, the ultra-Right, the death squads, if you will. That time period allowed certain evolutionary processes to take place.

## *The Institutionalizing of Elections*

**Colonel John Waghelstein**—I got there a couple days before the March elections, and we had geared up—the Salvadoran military had been prodded out of the barracks, out of the *cuarteles*, into the field, and it had been very active. Then just before the elections they were pulled back to guard the polling places. I believe at the time that was the correct plan. With one notable exception, they were able to effectively protect the populace, and the voters were able to turn out in surprisingly large numbers and vote despite the threats. The Army effectively sealed off attempts by guerrillas in a number of cities, including the capital, to penetrate and to disrupt the balloting. The problem was then to get them back out into the field after the elections were over.

Politically the situation was bad, even after the elections, as there was a right-wing coalition formed around the ARENA party that was determined to oust the Christian Democrats, notably Duarte and others, from the political arena. My discussions with Flores-Lima (then Chief of Staff, now Sub-Minister) indicated that the Army was not happy with ARENA and viewed it as an attempt to oust the party that had gotten 40 percent of the vote. This would cause problems for the Army which was committed to the land reform and to democracy. He indicated to me that they had served notice on the politicians that there wasn't going to be a power play. Therefore, it came as no surprise that Magaña was picked as the Interim President. He was the Army's man, and he served for the next two years until the presidential elections of last year (1984).

Militarily, things were pretty bad. Out of the 14 departments there were only two departmental commanders that

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

were worth a damn, the others being notably ineffective. The one exception that I mentioned to the success of the defense of the election was down in Usulután where the departmental commander allowed himself to be suckered out, and the guerrillas got into the city and disrupted the election. He was just one of several departmental commanders who should have been sent off to attaché duty in Chad or Tasmania or somewhere. There were lots of young lieutenant colonels around who knew what to do, but they were viewed with some suspicion by García, who, as Minister of Defense, was more intent on maintaining his power base within the military. Politically though, I will give García credit. He did his part in committing the military to the elections, to guaranteeing the elections, to guaranteeing the results and to the continuation of the reform.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—I would think that by the time I got there we had made an enormous amount of effort to begin to get them to deal with the continuing problems that were of great interest to us in a political sense: the question of judicial reform, of planning for the election, of opening up the political process. A lot of that had already begun. The guerrilla offensive didn't make it any easier to continue with that. Nevertheless, there was almost an overriding commitment on the part of everybody on our side to see that through. We did a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes with individuals in the bureaucracy and in the government to move ahead.

My sense is that the judicial reform issue is still a very important, outstanding, unfulfilled promise of our policy in El Salvador. It's not going to be easy over the long term to change, and it is perhaps the most difficult challenge. The organization of the electoral process at times was nip and tuck. It worked out quite well. The commitment of the military to pull up their

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

socks after the offensive, and turn themselves to combining their military planning with the absolute necessity of protecting the elections, gave them a new goal and respectability and a sense of pride in their potential accomplishment that they hadn't had before. It aligned them, in a sense, with the good guys for a long period of time. So, it made a big difference.

The depoliticization of the military was a very important factor throughout the whole effort, and the Defense Minister was an enormously important individual in making certain that the military stayed in bounds, widely recognized, respectable bounds of political behavior. He had to treat the military in El Salvador as an institution in its own right but one which had to adopt a course of supporting political change toward electoral democracy in large measure because their conclusions paralleled ours.

**Colonel James J. Steele**—In probably what has to be, as you write the history, an historical moment in El Salvador, Vides-Casanova, Blandón, López Nuila, all of the brigade commanders, in effect, the high command plus, were brought together and went in front of the press and everyone during the 1985 Assembly elections. There were a host of accusations that the elections were not fair and that the military had interfered, etc. Vides basically said—to those that had close ties to the old order—he said, “We lost over 600 people killed and wounded in the process of protecting this election, the campaign, and the voting itself. If any of you out there think that this is some kind of a damn card game that you don't like the results of and you just throw all the cards in, you're wrong. The military has no intention of being a party to throwing out these elections. It has been playing it's proper, constitutionally appropriate role in protecting the elections, and as far as the military is concerned, the elections stand.” This was significant!

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5–10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

## ***The Presidential Election of March 1984***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—The Right could not believe that the Christian Democrats had really won even 42 percent of the vote in 1982 without cheating. So this time they insisted on a ponderous system of voter registration, using American-financed computer technology. The result was utter confusion. Many people did not know where their names appeared on a list. Many stood in the wrong line for hours. Sometimes lists of ballots failed to arrive. The Right did not care whether voters got discouraged or gave up, because a lower turnout was supposed to favor them, especially in San Salvador.

I spent election day, March 25, 1984, at our party headquarters. I fielded the complaints about interference, intimidation and legal violations called in from one polling place or another. We were in permanent contact with the Army headquarters, because the military High Command had taken on the responsibility for enforcing the election rules that local commanders were flouting. General Vides Casanova stated publicly, "The Armed Forces reiterate their pledge that nobody, absolutely nobody, will sway the free choice of the ballot box."

Imperfect, but not impaired, the election results came in from around the country. My son Napoleón ran the party computer, analyzing the reports we received from our party observers at each ballot count. Both my sons and my daughters, their husbands and wives, worked for my candidacy in the party. By 11 P. M. we had our first projection, but only by 1 A. M. could we be fairly sure of the results. We knew that the Christian Democrats had won 45 percent, not quite a majority. D'Aubuisson was second with 29 percent, Chachi third with 16 percent. When the official results were counted, they gave us a bit less than our count: 43.4 percent of the vote.

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 197-201, 204-206. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

In the next round, between myself and D'Aubuisson on May 6, we had to receive more than 50 percent if I were to become president. The Right could stop me if the votes for Chachi and the other rightist parties went to D'Aubuisson. The critical difference would be made by the undecided voters who had not cast their ballots for me or D'Aubuisson the first time.

Our strategy was to talk with the local leaders of the smaller parties and seek out those voters who abstained during the first round. Instead of rallies and mass-media saturation, the second round of campaigning was quiet, personal, door-to-door canvassing.

Chachi told us his party would not make a deal with D'Aubuisson. He told PCN members to vote according to their individual consciences, but the local leaders went for D'Aubuisson. D'Aubuisson charged into his campaign, raging for a total confrontation with me. There is no denying he built up an anti-Duarte, anti-Christian Democrat hatred. They wanted an emotional campaign, but we refused to match their hysteria. Our campaign was reasoned and calm, to avoid inciting violent clashes between ARENA and the Christian Democrats.

D'Aubuisson played on nationalism, saying the Christian Democrats were internationally controlled. The press called me the American candidate, while the Far Right in the United States, led by Senator Jesse Helms, told D'Aubuisson the Christian Democrats were getting money from the CIA. We did not receive CIA funds. I know because we worked very hard and went into debt for our money. The party had saved some money that went to the Institutes for Christian Democratic Studies, supported by foundations and donations. For years we donated the proceeds from our lectures. For our campaign, we took out bank loans that are still being paid off with contributions from individuals. The government also provided funds to parties based on their percentage of the vote. I do not think money or external influence made any difference in this election.

On the second election day, in May, I stayed at home with my vice-presidential running mate, Rodolfo "Chele" Castillo. Chele and I spent the day watching old movies on television.

drinking coffee, pacing back and forth, while the party structure managed the process. Because I was afraid of what such fervid D'Aubuisson allies as Colonels Cruz and Morán could do, I asked the military High Command and the international observer missions to get to their areas, Morazán, Zacatecoluca, on election day. As one U.S. senator after another came into Morazán, with journalists and high-ranking officers too, Cruz realized what was happening and took off into the mountains with his men. Morán was neutralized, too. Except for a few small towns where it is easy for the Right to intimidate people, the observers and the press did help to keep the elections honest.

Election morning, the guerrillas launched a major attack on San Miguel. They even fired on the observers' helicopter, but within hours the guerrillas had fled and the people were back in lines at the polling places. The guerrilla threats never discouraged most Salvadorans from voting.

Compared to the first presidential round, the number voting increased because the elections were better organized. People had learned the first time exactly where they were assigned to vote. They did not have to search from table to table for their names. This time the choice was simple—only two candidates—and those running the polling places had become more efficient. . . .

By midnight, Alejandro came to me with his first projection. "You've won the election," he said simply. "Fifty-four percent of the vote." He had wanted to be absolutely sure before he told me, because he knew what it would mean to me. I had been elected president by the people of El Salvador despite, or because of all that had happened in the past—the stolen elections, seven years in exile, my role as a junta member and figurehead president in the bloodiest times. . . .

I had not taken any votes from the Right. Town by town, ARENA's votes were the sum of those cast for other rightist presidential candidates the first time. The votes that made the difference came from those who had not voted in the previous round. I won because we had a better turnout.

Our largest share of the vote came in the cities, not the countryside. D'Aubuisson used these statistics to say he won ten



out of fourteen provinces. Just after the election, he launched another campaign publicizing his complaints, trying to erase the fact that he had lost. D'Aubuisson is not the type of man to tolerate being beaten fairly. With false figures and wild denunciations, he claimed he really won the election. Only hours before the Central Election Council was to formally present to me the official certificate saying I had won the presidency, D'Aubuisson demanded that the election be annulled. We also uncovered a plot to kill me that day.

Military intelligence sources heard that the assassination plot was to be carried out on May 16, the day I was to receive the certificate designating me as president in a small ceremony at the National Theater. The American Embassy also learned of the plot, which included the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering as well. The information from the embassy coincided with ours on several points. First, the assassins planned to use a high-powered rifle with a telescopic sight, shooting when I entered or left the theater. Therefore, I entered from a side door, while Army sharpshooters were posted on the roofs of all surrounding buildings. The assassins expected another opportunity if I went into the streets to greet my followers after becoming president. We had to cancel any victory celebrations where I would join with people in the streets. . . .

The first Cabinet member I selected was the Defense Minister, General Vides Casanova. Rey Prendes, Alejandro and I had prepared a twenty-seven-point program on how the armed forces should function. I had consulted four officers on my plans. If Vides accepted my offer to be Defense Minister on the basis of the twenty-seven-point plan, then he was the logical choice. He had led the armed forces to conduct fair elections, he had the support of the officers corps. His presence in the government would inspire confidence within the armed forces.

When I asked him to be my defense minister, Vides responded, "I want to tell you that I've never felt a duty to you, only to the armed forces. But you've offered me the Defense Ministry and I will accept it to carry out faithfully the twenty-seven-point plan." He has repeated this to the officers when

there have been accusations that I try to manipulate the armed forces. Vides stressed his loyalty to the democratic program, not to me.

The most important part of this program was controlling the death squads and stopping the abuses by officers. Some of them had to be removed, disciplined or investigated internally. I was determined to pursue by every legal means, those responsible for crimes such as the Viera-Hammer-Pearlman murders. We agreed that when there was solid evidence of involvement, we would take action no matter who was accused. Finally we talked about the military structure, and although it was not popular, I decided to separate Army and police functions into two subsecretaries of the Defense Ministry. My choice of Colonel López Nuila to head the police forces had to overcome resistance because it placed him on an equal status with higher-ranking officers. López Nuila became the Undersecretary for Public Security, managing the National Police, the National Guard and the Treasury Police.

It is almost unbelievable how much was at stake in the selection of the Cabinet. We were trying for a social pact to bring as many different groups into the government as possible. The private enterprise sector was brought into the economic ministries. In order not to weaken the Christian Democratic presence in the National Assembly, I planned not to draw on any legislator, but a delegation of the party wore me out with their arguments.

My decision to offer Fidel Chávez Mena the Planning Ministry caused an uproar in the party. My supporters did not think he or his allies should be included in the government. But I wanted a government of reconciliation, tolerance and peace for the nation. The best place to start was within my own party. He was reluctant at first, then accepted. . . .

Once I had chosen the officials of my Administration, there had to be a clear understanding of what I expected from them. I spoke to each one individually, and all of them together. I laid out my plan for our government and the five goals: humanization, pacification, democratization, participation and economic reactivation.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—The elections were a success, in that they were closely watched internationally and generally came up to the standards of the international observers who came to see them. I think a lot of people came expecting to see the kind of demise of El Salvador and in a sense went back home tremendously impressed by the degree to which the Salvadoran public was prepared to support the elections. The public supported the elections because they were so exhausted by the lack of any other alternative that they were willing to try almost anything to try to end their own agony in the situation.

The success of Duarte and his own personality and his capacity to deal with the Congress—which was really key to the financing of all of these new activities—was important. The government was able to at least maintain some basic economic equilibrium in the face of all of this difficulty and disaster, mainly because of fairly large inputs on the order of 200 to 300 million dollars a year in U.S. economic assistance. This gave them an opportunity also at least to deal in a defensive way and in a stabilizing way (as opposed to a very forward, go-ahead growth-oriented way) with the economic problems and a capacity to move ahead slowly and inexorably in dealing with the question of human rights abuses.

### ***Impact of the Democratic Process on the FMLN***

**Miguel Castellanos**—We [the guerrillas] saw that the political project of Apaneca was being formed; that things were marching right along; that the new Constitution, which would

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

Commandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987. As quoted in *Conversaciones con el Comandante Miguel Castellanos*, edited by Javier Rojas P. (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), pp. 105-106. Copyright 1986 by Editorial Andante. Reprinted by permission of Editorial Andante.

establish the juridical bases of the new order, was marching right along. At that level it was a go, but the FMLN observed that that project was marching right along the fringe of the *masas*. It is true that there were elections in 1982, and the people went to vote. Some explain that they went for fear of being repressed, but they also admitted there was a middle class sector of the population that went to the ballot boxes because they thought there was a solution to the problem. The FMLN also saw the disposition of the political parties—neither to attack nor strike against the Christian Democrats as Romero and Molina had once done. The *petit-* and *moyenne-bourgeoises* saw a way out of the conflict.

The FMLN pondered the situation of the municipalities in the zones they controlled—they noticed that the people had not participated in the elections. I would say that up to date, the democratic process does not have any major influences in the FMLN. The government continues to operate at an institutional level; not at a level of the *masas*. With respect to the military, the FMLN sees the Army going down the tubes. What remains is political, and with the transferring of titles of land brought by the reforms, it is given greater impulse.

**C-5 Spokesperson**—The Latin American guerrilla is a lousy Leninist. Normally they are lousy in terms of understanding what Lenin really said. Lenin thought of himself as a subversive, first and foremost. That means you subvert from within. Sure you always use terrorism, sure you have your guerrillas—you need guerrillas, you need violence—but they are a complement to another subversive effort. I don't think the guerrillas in most Latin American countries understand that. It goes against *machismo* or something. Again they violated Leninist principles of subversion when they boycotted the elections. The FDR should have come back and taken part. That would have really produced a crisis. Then you would have the

C-5 is the joint civil-military staff of El Salvador. The C-5 spokesperson, whose name and position were withheld by request of the individual and with the concurrence of responsible U.S. and Salvadoran officials, was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 28 September 1987.

right-wing element saying, "Wait a minute. We can't have the FDR taking part in the elections."

By taking part in the elections, they could have really destroyed the elections, if they would have had the brains to do that. Instead they boycotted the elections, and they machine-gunned people standing in lines in the elections. They blew up election booths. They had a violent, overt negative reaction to the elections, and they set themselves up. What happened? The Salvadoran people by the millions voted.

The elections, most definitely, were depressing for the guerrillas. Actually there was something else. While it was depressing for the guerrillas, it really stoked the Army. I visited San Francisco Gotera with Ernesto, the former guerrilla commander who operated in Morazán at the time of the elections with orders to stop the elections.

I also went there with a guy who is now a captain but at that time as a young lieutenant right out of the military academy had orders to protect the elections. It was a unique experience that I could be there with these two guys. This was in '87, and they were looking back on the elections. I don't know if they were in '82, or '84, but they were both in Morazán, one trying to stop the elections, one trying to protect the elections. They were both sitting there talking together about what they both did during that election period.

The captain, at that time a lieutenant, was in San Francisco Gotera, and he said the peasants came in from the hills to vote and the guerrillas attacked the town during the elections, during the voting period. He was a young guy so he was kind of excited, coming under fire. He had his men take their fighting positions, and there was a fire fight. He said the civilians all threw themselves on the ground, instinctively. There was a little short fire fight, and then after the shooting stopped the civilians got up and got back in line. That happened more than once, and then the shooting started again, and civilians all threw themselves on the ground or took cover, and then when the shooting stopped, they got up and they got back in line. Mao and Marx and all these guys talk about the will of the people, but this was really it. This was a really palpable demonstration

of the will of the people. The real popular will. What all the Leninists are always talking about. This was it, this was the real thing, not manufactured, not manipulated the way they do it. This was authentic, genuine, popular desire for democracy, and unfortunately it has been frustrated, but that is another story. But at that time they had a great deal of faith, in that they wanted democracy. They wanted change.

The lieutenant said that, seeing this display of courage by unarmed civilians and this commitment, and nobody was forcing them to, despite all the propaganda to the contrary, nobody could force a peasant to come out of the hills of Morazán and go to Gotera and do anything if he doesn't want to. But they did it. They did it voluntarily. He told me, "It made my hair stand on end. It made shivers go up and down my spine to see these civilians do this, masses of them." He also said that, "For the first time I felt a unity of the Army with the people. I am protecting an activity that the people want. The people obviously want elections and I am here protecting them and I am part of this."

This was the first time he said that he, as a young officer, felt unity with the people. It was a new feeling, it was totally new. That says something about the Army before. He says there was a new and exciting feeling and a change. It really brought home to him the message that gets repeated in all the propaganda, but to a lot of people it rings hollow. To him it was really true. He said, "We are here serving the people. We are the protectors of the people for real and in very palpable concrete terms." That kind of colored his whole thinking about his role, the role of the Army.

It made him feel good about the Army. Made him feel good about himself and it gave him a great admiration for the civilians. Conversely, the guerrillas are seeing this great popular display against them. It was demoralizing to them. In terms of that, we have this situation of demoralization. We have the democratic improvement. We have the promulgation of the war. However, you still have this hatred for the soldiers and this fear of reprisal. My point has been that the Army changed its behavior. That's fine, but images don't change from one year to

the other. The change I'm talking about actually came about pretty quickly. I would say from '83 to '85. We are talking about a major change accomplished in two-three years. In terms of institutions, that is lightning quick. Look at the civil rights movement in the United States and the civil rights laws. We even make a lot of demands on our allies, and I think the Salvadorans have produced and we don't appreciate it. They have changed, rapidly, but the American press and American public opinion just does not want to recognize it.

### ***Subsequent Election***

***Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila***—During his [Magaña] provisional government they had new elections. The winning party, the Christian Democratic party, did not win the presidential elections by a majority; therefore, a second election was needed. In the second election, President Duarte won by almost 53.6 percent. With this percentage he was elected President of the Republic and began to govern the nation on 1 June '84. However, the opposition seems to have the leading part in the Assembly. Then, in 1985 they had new elections for deputies. With these elections Duarte was able to choose 33 deputies. With this he obtained a majority in the Assembly in order to be able to govern. Since 1979, we have had four clean, free elections.

During these four elections there was considerable increase in participation by the Salvadoran electorate. This has probably been the greatest proof by which the people have shown support for the political project, the government, and the armed forces. We have always understood why the people massively supported the elections. We took it as a reference indicating that the people preferred to be governed by the democratic parties rather than the leftist parties. The option was definitely for a democracy.

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.



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## *Armed Forces Change and National Plan Development*

### *The State of the Army in 1982*

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**—In 1982 (and even in 1983), everyone believed that the Salvadoran Army was an army that fought from 9 to 5. When I went to Washington to visit President Reagan, I was asked about that, and I tried to explain to them that it was not true. Unfortunately, there was a lot of truth to it. There was a lot of truth to that because we didn't have enough troops to fight 24 hours a day. That is, if we were going to fight 24 hours a day we needed one soldier fighting 12 hours and another fighting the other 12 hours. Therefore, the first limitation we had was not having enough soldiers to fight 24 hours a day. Secondly, during 1982, the guerrilla forces were very strong. I think they had probably close to 12,000 men at the time. Their presence ranged not only from Morazán and Chalatenango but also in La Paz and Usulután. Except for the western part of the country, it seemed they had control of most of the areas.

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.



It was very difficult if we needed to have a military operation in Morazán. We had to move troops from Sonsonate for that operation. We didn't have any helicopters. We were extremely limited. In San Miguel, La Unión, and in Gotera you could easily need an operation of 5,000 to 7,000 men. We ourselves had only 5,000 to 7,000 in the entire area; we couldn't do it. The Army was criticized a lot for that reason. It was said that the Army did not want to fight. That's not true. I think the Army has always wanted to fight because that is its function. Our Army had only 400 to 500 officers at the time.

The guerrillas were unable to convince our officers to join their forces, with the exception of the case in Santa Ana of Captain Sandoval and two other Army doctors, Cruz and Navarrete, and one other officer I can't recall. Even if they tried to convince a soldier and in some cases due to family ties—a brother who might have been a guerrilla—they were not very successful. The most a soldier would have done was to pass on information but never significant enough to have a *cuartel* turned over to the guerrillas. Those were the issues I was worried about in 1982.

I feared a mutiny within the *cuarteles*, but fortunately that never happened. That shows two things: first, the Army was not in such bad shape. That is, there was discipline and determination on the part of the officers to avoid something like that. It is possible that there would have been certain minor incidents but never serious ones. And secondly, the guerrillas were incapable of convincing them. That is important, too. They were never able to convince them to join their forces. Therefore, as a result of the unsuccessful turnout of the final offensive, the guerrillas decided to prolong the war.

### ***Professionalizing the Armed Forces***

**General Juan Bustillo**—Unlike our armed forces, the Salvadoran guerrillas were receiving tremendous support. Our

General Juan Bustillo, Chief of Salvadoran Air Force, 1979 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 January 1987.

armed forces had very little equipment. We faced two major problems. First, we had very few personnel, and second, we did not have the capability or the training to confront a subversive force. These subversive forces were not created in one day. Gradually, they had been acquiring certain characteristics we ignored in the past precisely because we were not capable of dealing with it. We did not have the necessary training for combat and we lacked a fundamental element: enough trained personnel in order to obtain information and intelligence from the enemy. Therefore, those who executed the operation in the armed forces lacked information and adequate intelligence. We just did not have that capability.

I think that neither our officers nor our troops should be blamed for this. I think that the former high-ranking officers in the military did not take on the responsibility to provide us with the necessary preparation and skill to confront a problem like we have today. Maybe it was due to the fact that we were not as experienced, that we were not really in command of the units, but we ignored the situation and believed the occasional reports that the insurgents were under control.

We were told the intelligence officers had knowledge of every move the insurgents made. We found out later on this was not true because when we younger officers took hold of the situation after the 15 October coup, we had to deal with the problems in the streets and up in the mountains. We acquired a lot of experience that way. But it wasn't an experience that was left behind by the former military officers. They left us with a lot of problems and grievances and without the knowledge that the insurgents had been trained and heavily equipped by other countries.

We had to start improvising and dealing with this internal problem in El Salvador, which was not just a military problem but also a political, economic, social, and international problem. We lacked credibility in our government and armed forces and, therefore, had to begin to rebuild our armed forces and institutional prestige and credibility within the international world.

Our struggle was not only in dealing with the insurgents. We had a lot of internal and external pressures that required us to build a professional armed forces. That was very difficult. It

has taken us a lot of time to gain our prestige in the eyes of the world. Our former officers left us with tremendous socio-economic and political chaos, and when we came in after the 15 October coup we had to start from scratch. It was a social explosion. And even with our very limited human and materiel resources we started looking for solutions to these problems.

### ***Changes in Leadership***

**Colonel John Cash**—Around May Vides took over as Minister of Defense and many things began to change. He started an effort to have people become more amenable to human rights, which was very successful. He began to make himself visible by visiting all the *cuarteles*, something that García never did unless there were TV cameras. That did a lot to improve things for the Salvadorans. And when Ambassador Pickering came, he had a different orientation than Ambassador Hinton. He was just as professional in a different kind of way. He began to work closely with the Salvadorans. The military and political reforms began to happen which made his job easier. November of '84 is when the Salvadorans probably did the most important thing to put them on a winning track. They started to get rid of the dead wood we'd been telling them about for months. That's when they put in Monterosa. With a hot shot strategist like Monterosa, who I'd put up against any American hot shot, things began to happen, and it began to make a difference in the theater.

### ***Vice-President Bush's Visit Provokes a Change***

**General Adolfo Blandón**—In my opinion, the importance of Vice-President Bush's visit to El Salvador was his specific

Colonel John Cash, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1981 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 20 March 1987.

General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.

worries concerning the human rights situation in El Salvador and the forceful manner in which he spoke to us at the residence of the President of the Republic. The Minister of Defense, the rest of the high military command, other representatives of the military units were all at the house.

We noticed how concerned Vice-President Bush was with respect to the human rights situation. We told him that we were making great efforts to have the military units and the security forces initiate a campaign in favor of human rights. I believe his visit provoked a change. Little by little this change has continued to effectively materialize, to such a degree that last year we've accomplished a major success in that El Salvador was recognized for its advances made in the area of human rights. Vice-President Bush commented that he had some specific cases, but he did not mention them.

We all understood that U.S. support for this war—according to his opinion—could only be continued if we had a comprehensive program and understood what it meant, in the current situation, to respect the human being's integrity and to respect people's property.

**Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III**—After November, when the next general order came out, Vides cleaned house. Rubio came in from Chalatenango and took over as the D-2 [Army Intelligence]. He's a super guy. Monterosa went to the 3rd Brigade. Rodríguez Morcio went into San Vicente. He was kind of a big mover. Ochoa went to the States. Cruz stayed in Morazán, and we started to consolidate.

Vice-President Bush's showing up at this time was really an ultimatum to the military. But it also served to strengthen Vides' hand at a time when he was pretty weak. He just had kicked over the tanda system\* in effect, not completely, but he

Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1983 to 1984, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 29 May 1985.

\*Tanda system—Groupings formed at the Military Academy and maintained throughout one's career. They exert great influence over decisions affecting the military and sometimes have been known to attempt to influence the political process.

really did some dramatic things, and it strengthened him. So much so that when the devastating attack in El Paraíso happened three weeks later and the Crucalón bridge went down on New Year's morning, everybody turned and said, "This was going to go anyway." Vides said, "Yes, but I have the support I need from the U.S. mission, and I need your support. If you don't do it, this is going to happen again." In other words, he said that this was a good example of what was going to happen if we didn't get this thing turned around—and get it turned around real fast. So, he turned it in his favor, building up on the Vice-President's visit. Fortuitously, a week after the Crucalón bridge, the guerrillas attacked Chalatenango and were thrown out. From that point, it was all up hill—that's the turnaround point.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—In part, it was almost a clear sense of impending doom if they didn't. They were beginning to stare real defeat in the face, and for many of them it meant the loss of their country and maybe the loss of their lives, certainly the loss of their families. Some may have gotten out, some may have not. Also, an increasing confidence that the United States was prepared to stay the course with them and to be with them throughout this process. And an increasing sense, as they succeeded from time to time, that they could do the job. And a feeling that training, new ideas, new dedication, and hard work on their own side could make a difference. Also a feeling that corruption, political misbehavior, human rights abuses, and all of those kinds of things threatened the very support that they required in order to survive. That was certainly brought home by the Bush visit in a very real way.

I think that at least the vision of the visit that Vice-President Bush made was an important psychological turning point both in the attitude of the military toward their continued capacity to operate in the ways in which they had in the past and those in the military who wanted to end the abuses suddenly had the strong sense that they had very high-level allies in the U.S. administration.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

I think, particularly the fact that the Reagan administration put down a hard, firm marker, perhaps for the first time, as to exactly how it felt, it no longer had the attitude that there may have been some bad guys, but they were strongly anti-Communists, and therefore, they were our bad guys, and they ought to be tolerated. Perhaps the situation had gotten bad enough that they could become the seeds of the destruction of the whole policy if they weren't turned around, and therefore, a high-level commitment by somebody like Bush made sense at the time when it came.

### ***Recognizing the Need for Change***

**Colonel René Emilio Ponce**—We understand the function of the armed forces in a democratic society is to provide support in giving impetus to the democratic process. But one of the most significant advancements made during these past years has been to create an image for ourselves in the eyes of the international world as a respecter of human rights and a terminator of abuses inflicted on the people by governmental authorities. We must face the fact that we were, at one time, responsible for the brutalities and ill-treatment imposed on the citizens of this country. I repeat, the support and impetus given to the democratic process and the socio-economic reforms were essential.

### ***Major Changes for the Armed Forces***

**General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova**—In order for our armed forces to survive this period, our first major goal focused on dealing with the people. We needed to know what were their

Colonel René Emilio Ponce, former C-3 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and now Commander of the Third Brigade, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987.

anxieties, their complaints, their motivations, their needs. We also needed to understand and accept that we were part of these people. They gave us their full support, and we in turn had to defend them against the attacks by the subversive forces. We needed to give them the guarantee that they would be able to freely elect their own leaders, and we needed to treat them as humanly as possible.



**General Carlos  
Eugenio Vides Casanova**

What had to be done, and has been done to some degree, was to establish some sort of reference point from where we could act in the future. That is to say that the armed forces established the following points before the entire nation. It was a calling made to the future officers that were graduating and subsequently, the entire armed forces.

First, the eminent professionalism in the military field was understanding the roots and the objective reality of this war in order to establish an efficient organization to win. We needed to have truly professional military men that would not only excel but also understand that part of the problem that we are dealing with today is due to the social, economic, and political problems. And, understanding that we had to respond to the insurgents' attacks, not only at the military level, but also at the national level.

Second, re-establish discipline as a fundamental pillar to support our entire Army without any leniency or deception, whatsoever. There had always been discipline within the armed forces, but following the 15 October coup we had a divided army, to the extent that each half would confront each other violently. We needed to reinstitute one of the basic pillars to maintain stability, and we have successfully managed this. We have done this without leniency, without any exceptions. In many cases this has been necessary not only from the military

point of view but also with respect to the human rights situation.

Third, we had a divided Army. My duty was then to restrengthen the unity of the armed forces and the nation as one group, rejecting all internal and external influence. For a long time now we have been receiving a lot of attacks from overseas, attacks from within the armed forces, and attacks from political factions attempting to set a coup d'etat. A divided armed forces was completely vulnerable to these attacks.

Our responsibility was to reunite the armed forces. First, because there was a country we had to save; second, because we needed to save our own institution; and third, because we had an obligation to serve and defend the people of this country. I want to confess to you that I did not always think that way. During the first years I was in a more difficult position. I did not oppose the agrarian reform, but I was not a fanatic of it either.

My mentality changed, however, and I started to realize that there should not be any hatred among the people of this country. When I opposed the reforms I was opposing the way they had been created. I tried to find some justice behind them. I was thinking more in terms of national unity and the institutional unity than I was in sharing land. However, throughout this entire ordeal I have supported these reforms as a necessity but not necessarily as a vocation.

Fourth, the patriotism that will be expressed in the honesty, abnegation, and sacrifice by the individual when performing his duties. Honesty and sacrifice are needed in order for us to lead our soldiers into combat and, overall, to be able to stay alive in this war. This has not been easy, but we have managed to survive for the last seven years when no one, at first, believed we would.

Fifth, a strong vigilance in the fulfillment of our political program, assumed and demonstrated by the collective citizenship throughout the civic struggle for peace. Looking for the path of reason in order to attain justice. There had already been elections for a national Constituent Assembly. This was the first step the armed forces took in order to obtain



conciliation from all the Salvadorans and to establish in the political constitution, the rules of the game for which we were each held responsible.

There was representation from different political parties in this Constituent Assembly, and you could say that the Right had a majority with respect to the votes. This meant that if there had been any previous injustice they could balance a constitution that, to my knowledge, fulfills all of the requirements. It also has the possibility of being reformed during two terms of the Assembly, in the event that something does not work out in the future. This has had some considerable effect on the situation of El Salvador. The people decided to go to the ballot boxes and cast their votes under pressures and threats posed by the guerrillas rather than to support them. The people would rather fight through for a democratic system. Our obligation to the people was, "We aren't going to let them down. We are going to prove to everyone that the armed forces supports the democratic system."

Sixth, complete support to the central government of the Republic in its effort toward national unity. At that time Dr. Alvaro Magaña Borja was Interim President. He created a plan, APANECA, in which he attempted to involve all of the different political parties. He issued several government projects, and we supported them because this was a first attempt to try and unite the people. Our duty was to unite the armed forces and cooperate in the effort to reunite the country.

Seventh, complete support to the democratization process, understanding it to be the incorporation of all of the national forces and sectors in the conflict, including those "civilized" disputes that originate in the ideological field and doctrinaire principles. Disputes that can only be dissolved if there is peace and mutual respect between the people. We then assumed that, with these efforts, we had already taken our first steps toward an initial democratic process. Our second step was to support the following: (1) maintain a strong armed forces, (2) maintain a separate boundary from politics, and (3) the armed forces was to support the democratic process. The support to the central government materialized when President Duarte took power.

Eighth, a watchful and vigilant process through which the social changes established by the armed forces, since the 15 October coup d'etat, could materialize and provide the truthful and just benefits of a democracy for our people. This meant that if the armed forces had provided the 15 October reforms without thinking twice about it, we were giving our solemn word that these reforms were going to be maintained according to what was established in the democratic process. That meant that if the Assembly accepted it into the constitution we would defend that, and if the Assembly rejected it we would also defend that.

We were basically telling the Assembly that they held maximum authority for establishing rules of the game for our people. We let the Assembly work at this, and the political constitution was approved. The reforms that had been somewhat modified, some in favor, others have at least remained in writing, allowed for these reforms to be shaped and incorporated into the most important document of the political constitution. We were always thinking about the needs of the people and not of the personal needs of a specific group or individual.

Ninth, a profound and truthful position of respect from the high command and, accordingly, from all the armed forces toward human rights and all the Salvadoran people. No longer because of external demands, but because of personal conviction.

I believe that when many people heard about these nine points they thought of demagogy. I knew of the implications of these nine points—the responsibility and the effort which had to be made in order to make them work. It was an extremely difficult task to perform because I, individually, had to make sure this was going to be successful. Unfortunately, it was not to be a direct effort by the entire armed forces. While I remained as Minister of Defense I was going to make sure that every word behind these nine points was to be accomplished, not only because I thought it as something basic, but because I knew it was the only way to save this country and our own institution—the Army.

## ***Changes for the Security Forces***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—I will begin by pointing out those situations which the people probably refer to as products of change and of the effort that it has taken at any given time. The most important thing is probably the work that has been accomplished since 15 October of '79 in which we received totally run-down, extremely unprofessional, and incompetent police corps. Those were the circumstances we had to confront from the first day and without the aid of the United States. We then had to basically start from scratch, without any resources—human, materiel—but with a strong determination and precise objective to undertake the necessary changes.

I have talked about the fundamental issues of maintaining public security forces, to have the police combat common delinquency. But, in addition we have the additional need to combat terrorist delinquency. This means we had to exert an extra effort. But we have successfully made that effort, which is an effort for change. We have tried to introduce new attitudes in the minds of each policeman, each guard, as opposed to what they used to be. That is, a new attitude, completely professional with a clear concept as to what is really important in his line of work within the community, what we classified as the social function of the public security forces. That has been a very difficult job, which we've managed to accomplish successfully.

There has been a substantial change, and we haven't really noticed it because we are part of it, but the people outside have noticed it. It is the people who have noticed this change and have allowed us to establish a certain dynamic for change that has favored us and helped us take on the initiative in seeking the best way to professionalize our forces in order to maintain peace and offer the best security for our people. This peace and this security are also based on the respect for human rights for these people. That is fundamental for us. That is our motivation and incentive for doing our job.

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

## ***Change in Focus: In Spite of Who's Elected***

**Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya**—You see our army has changed for the positive. Many people have changed because they've understood the need for a democratic country. But, unfortunately, many people want us to learn these lessons in a rapid and simple way. You know that all the countries and peoples of the world have had to endure pain and suffering, warfare, walking long stretches dragging chains, and dragging vices inherited through previous generations, in order to achieve what they have presently. That is the procedure for a democratic country. Unfortunately, we are at the beginning stage, but the Army has behaved itself throughout this process of change.

We are more respectful of human rights, and we want to continue this process, not only with respect to human rights, but also with respect to the legally elected government and free elections. And that is what we'll continue to do in spite of who is elected to our government. We will respect the will of the people because that is the focal point from which a democracy should flourish. We believe the Army has matured tremendously. The current policy gives us the right to always be able to respond to anyone who attacks us. Unfortunately, many mistakes are made, but "to err is human." We are not machines. Many people would like all of us in the military to be perfect, unfortunately.

Perfect just like them. But unfortunately, this is a very difficult world we live in, and who has the right to throw stones at someone else? The crystal ball will be viewed and interpreted differently, regardless if you are inside of it or not. If I am inside the crystal ball, I will view it one way, and he who is outside will see it differently, and vice versa. I believe that mutual respect and the way in which each of us throughout the world tries to help the other improve the countries and the making of nations are key ingredients in this process.

Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987.

## *Origins of the National Plan*

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—At some point we ought to acknowledge the importance of the National Plan. I called it a campaign plan.

We should have been conducting campaign planning. In my view, that's an appropriate orientation. Deane Hinton didn't know what I was talking about, and he called it National Plan. He opposed that kind of an effort for quite a few months but finally agreed that we could do that sort of thing.

You may recall, the Mil Group was not capable of doing that and doing everything else they had to do. That was another reason I was trying to put an intelligence and an operationally oriented officer in the Mil Group and to reinforce with appropriate skills at the right times from USSOUTHCOM. To help the Salvadorans develop a campaign plan, that was the next step to take after Woerner helped develop the strategic appreciation and force structure.

We then had to come to grips with the force development actions that Woerner recommended, along with the doctrine and all the functional capabilities, and sew the thing together in terms of political-military objectives in El Salvador. I don't know whether it was suspicion or reluctance (for whatever reason) on the part of the U.S. Embassy to allow the military to undertake that effort.

When we finally did get the Ambassador's concurrence to proceed, he would not allow USSOUTHCOM to participate, and it had to be done from the Mil Group. Waghelstein was there by then, and we were able to provide Stevenson and a couple other officers from USSOUTHCOM to work with them from time to time. They worked under the Ambassador's very close supervision.

I could hardly put any guidance into the pot, except what I could give directly to the Mil Group commander. Of course the National Plan (so-called) originally had a narrow focus on Usulután and San Vicente. That was all right with me. It was

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

sensible on the ground to prioritize and execute the campaign plan with a narrow focus. Obviously, even that was a hell of a job. Again, relationships with the Salvadorans by that time were more positive than intra-U.S. relationships.

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—By mid-1983, the improvements began to have an effect. New commanders, new training facilities, newly trained units, and better inter-service cooperation contributed to a growing optimism among the Salvadorans. The military assets necessary for conducting a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign were now available.

Assuming all the organizational force structure and personnel problems noted could be remedied, the problem of focus remained. The Salvadoran military was still preoccupied with killing the guerrillas and little understood that this aspect of the war was incidental to winning popular support and ultimately the war.

So we started asking all those painful questions. We also started asking about the government's campaign plan. Initially there was no plan, and we kept telling them that the secret is popular support. The guerrillas are targeting the economy, and there is only one way you can combat that—and it isn't by multibattalion sweeps in northern Morazán. We weren't, however, getting through. The military was not about to change its direction on our say-so. What we needed was presidential clout, and that's why we ended up briefing Minister García and President Magaña.

The briefing, organized in the form of a discussion of options, was held at the high command on 2 February 1983. It was attended by President Magaña, Ambassador Hinton, General Woerner, General García (the Minister of Defense), selected members of the U.S. country teams, Military Group personnel, and key Salvadoran military leaders. The objective was to explore together how to proceed with the war. What we did was pick up from where the Woerner Report left off and run in the direction that it pointed. The outcome of these discussions was a presidential directive to the military and the civilian

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

ministries to establish a joint military-civilian entity to plan, execute, and coordinate a plan in the two key departments of San Vicente and Usulután.

The National Campaign Plan placed emphasis on civic action and developmental projects behind a security screen. This is a radical departure from the purely military, multibattalion operations extant prior to the Plan.

### ***Government Priorities Tended to Go in Other Directions***

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—All of us felt that there ought to have been a kind of integrated economic development and combined defense and military effort to be worked out over a long period of time. To try to develop some concept of this, we needed to involve things like integration of military operations, civilian defense, and economic development. We found an enormous incapacity in the government at all levels to deal with this, both conceptually and practically. The issue broke down constantly because government priorities tended to go in other directions. They tended to see a large share of the activities in a purely military sense on the one hand, or purely political on the other.

There were times when conflicts among parties and individuals tended to determine where resources might go. There were such overwhelming needs for resources that the resources we were able to bring to bear often didn't make a major dent in the development area. Often the guerrillas would find opportunities to disrupt or spoil those kinds of approaches.

But some progress actually was made. Up in Chalatenango things moved ahead, and we got new roads open and new areas under relative control, not perfect control. And some of the other marginal areas in the center of the country, some of the key departments that had been pretty much besieged, began to open up their activities a little more when roads became more

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

passable. Then as the guerrillas shifted and tried to expand their activities, they tried to put the western part of the country in more danger and were relatively successful in doing it. They tried urban operations in the towns. There the government forces had more success against guerrilla operations than the guerrillas had against the government. But that floated up and down.

In the eastern part of the country there was more success in dealing with guerrilla activities in the populated areas where they had become relatively more isolated. Even then the government was having the first opportunities to move up into Morazán against the border even though they were not able to completely control it or to do much in terms of big strikes of great success against major guerrilla areas of lodgment or to cement things against supply bases. There was some success against the supply activities, some in an intelligence sense, but they were always very tough to deal with both against what we believed were seaborne supply activities as well as overland, across the Honduran border. That was the effort.

### *Evolution of the Plan*

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—We began in 1983, with a plan for the area of San Vicente. That plan was meant to bring the areas under control that had been traditionally under subversive forces and to install a security system in those areas so the people that once lived there could return and start a new life. The plan was designed to develop the economy and at the same time re-establish those public services that had been destroyed. The plan worked out very well in San Vicente. We later wanted to extend it into Usulután, but unfortunately we did not have the means to do so.

Beginning with this year [1987] a new plan was to be implemented, and we were supposedly counting on U.S. aid to accomplish this. The plan was called Unidos Para Reconstruir

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.



[United to Reconstruct]. The objectives for this plan were the same as the previous one, however, at a national level. It would create once again the local authority's entire infrastructure. The local public services' infrastructure; that is, creating once again the population centers so they could turn into production centers—agricultural, industrial, agro-industrial, or commercial. But unfortunately, since the earthquake, this situation has worsened, and the country's economic condition, being as bad as it was, did not help.

### ***Status of the Plan at the End of 1984***

**Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III**—The National Plan was a well conceived, carefully thought out program largely engineered by John Waghelstein and Jim Hallums, massaged, worked to a great degree with Ambassador Deane Hinton. Additionally, an important role was played by General Fred Woerner. Once they had it all put together, they briefed it to President Magaña himself. He approved the concept. It contained regional coordination centers, with all the civilian and military actors, as well as a force development program. It was initially based on taking advantage of interior lines. Thus, with the rainy season coming on, initial emphasis was placed on San Vicente Province, which had less economic value but which was closer to San Salvador than Usulután. (Although Usulután had played a strong psychological pivotal role in the history of El Salvador.)

At the advent the Army and key social segments all went to the field. They trained and operated together. Initially, it went pretty well. They had people working on the staff in San Vicente, the National Planning staff, the students from the Staff College. They were a real bright bunch of guys and really had a good hold of what needed to be done. Emphasis was placed on

Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1983 to 1984, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 29 May 1985.

the developmental aspect as opposed to the military parameter alone, with the acknowledgment that you couldn't develop anything if you didn't have security. At that time the U.S. Mission's attitude toward the National Plan was that it was primarily an economic developmental initiative, with the El Salvadoran military insisting they should be in complete control with their managerial expertise. The problem, of course, was that the military went ahead, all over the country, seizing the initiative.

The El Salvadoran Armed Forces got way out in front of the developmental aspect of the plan, perhaps too far out in front. They outstripped their own capability as far as support systems were concerned. However, they couldn't keep going forward. In the military arena, if you aren't going forward, you start going backwards quickly. There was no plan for compensating for the fact that the civilian initiative was necessarily going to move slower, and at the same time the military had to keep going ahead or lose the initiative.

### *Importance of the Plan*

**General John R. Galvin**—First of all, the most important event was the one that culminated in the National Plan, the UPR [Unidos Para Reconstruir—United to Reconstruct]. Now, as we worked toward that plan, a number of things happened, many of which were setbacks and some of which were successes. In general, it would be laid out like this. First, there was the statement by Joaquín Villalobos that indeed the Marxist guerrillas had been forced to move back to small unit operations and that the promise of early success on their part was out. And during most of the two years, the guerrillas indeed found themselves reeling back from the pressure that had been put on them by the military. But we recognized that that could be only a temporary thing.

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

The guerrillas, although they were pushed back, broke down into smaller groups so that they could put more energy and effort into proselytizing the people—into what they call “conscientization”—working on the political conscience of the people. In other words, trying to make Marxists out of the people, trying to exploit every weakness that the Salvadoran government had, e.g., its indifference to the people. Now, basically that is what the guerrillas worked on during the whole two-year period. They kept trying to recruit and build the political infrastructure of Marxism in the country.

Now, we started to oppose that and tried to destroy that by building the democratic infrastructure of the country. The ability of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Transportation and all the other ministries to serve the people—especially to rebuild the economy of the country, which was vitally important at the time—was not sufficient.

Additionally, we suffered certain setbacks. The first of those was the Zona Rosa incident where the Marines were killed. The second was the kidnapping of Inés Guadalupe. Another was the austerity program that President Duarte had to adopt in order to work the economic problem. Another was the earthquake itself. Those were four strong setbacks, significant difficulties with which the government had to deal. In each case they caused some problems.

Also, President Duarte all along was not supported by what we in the United States would call big business in El Salvador, the businessmen. Because he is from the Christian Democratic party and because he has a centralized view of how to run the economy, the big businessmen rejected him and felt that he did not create an environment in which they could prosper. Duarte also had strong feelings of rejection for the businessmen because they had left the country. In his opinion they were all living in Miami, while the little businessman—the man with the small shop on the corner of the street, the man who sold fruit under a tent—was supporting the country. So, all of those things mitigated against any smooth sailing for the plan *Unidos Para Reconstruir*. However, because the military were strongly successful throughout the period (although once in a

while they suffered a setback or two), the military war went well. However, we all recognized that the military war could not succeed unless the economic war, unless the war for the education of the populace, and the many other wars also succeeded.



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## *Outside Efforts Aid the Government*

THE EDITORS—The period from the end of 1981 to the end of 1984 demonstrates the multidimensional character of modern conflict. The seemingly successful actions of the insurgents against the government forces were the most obvious aspects. Nevertheless, while the insurgents were stressing the military dimension of the struggle, the government concentrated on the strategic dimension of gaining legitimacy and, thus, internal and external support. Despite numerous military setbacks, the armed forces were never totally defeated, and the government was able to establish the necessary credibility to attain the support it needed. The key to success in this context was the outside effort which enabled the government to upgrade and professionalize the armed forces. External aid was admittedly inconsistent and not as effective as it might have been, but it made the difference between defeat and survival.

### *The Venezuelan Effort*

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—Venezuelan Special Forces Mobile Training Teams had trained two light Cazador battalions

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

in Salvador. There were a couple of reasons why they were training these light battalions: First, during that time frame we didn't have any money to train Salvadorans. All we had gotten was the CRA [Congressional Continuing Resolution Appropriation] of 25 million dollars to begin the fiscal year with. Secondly, the Venezuelans are also Latins. They do a good job. In some respects they are better at the job than we are. The El Salvadorans seem to respond to the Venezuelans in a pretty positive way. Being fellow Latins, there's a certain commonality in the language that's not filtered out by any mental translations and that sort of thing. They knew their business, and the thing that they brought with them was a similar experience from the early sixties, in which they were besieged and beset. We had helped them to train their Cazador units, trained their light infantry units, and they in turn now are passing on the expertise.

There are problems with third country training. At the risk of stating the obvious, first, you've got to find a country in whose national interest it is to support El Salvador. That doesn't happen quite as easily as you might think. The Venezuelan domestic political scene makes the Venezuelans very careful about mobile training teams. They have to be very careful. That's why to date it's been very hard to mobilize the third country support. One of the reasons the Venezuelans are so acceptable is they don't have an antidemocratic stigma as the Chileans have. They have the democratic experience that's worked now for 20 years plus. They are good at their job, and the ideological connection between the Christian Democratic party in El Salvador and their counterpart in Venezuela is also very good.

Other than the Venezuelan Mobile Training Teams, whose presence was revealed by some of our leaders at the most inopportune time, there hasn't been a hell of a lot of support from other Latin American countries in terms of materiel support. Various schools throughout South American countries have provided quotas for their schools. There's always a handful of Salvadoran officers that are going to school in Chile or Paraguay or Argentina or somewhere. The Taiwanese have

offered security assistance in various forms. The fact is, Lieutenant Colonel Ochoa went to Taiwan for school particularly during that period when we weren't doing anything for El Salvador, when there wasn't a hell of a lot of support.

### ***“Wolf!”***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—My estimate at the end of '82, early '83, was that the whole thing was about to go down the tubes. The leftist guerrillas in El Salvador were very strong. The armed forces did not yet have their act together. We'd been beating on them to improve their professional performance in terms of communications, command and control, intelligence activities, planning and executing operations, and the kind of tactics that they had to use, to adopt appropriate small unit tactics.

We beat on them from late '80 through '82 with limited, noticeable change in performance and logistics. They bought hundreds of Ford trucks at one point. They had absolutely no control over issue, no system for maintenance, no system for dispatch. When they needed transport to move a reserve force in reaction to some guerrilla challenge, the trucks were scattered all over the country, and they didn't know who had them. There were just tremendous problems in all those areas, and we tried to work with them to find reasonable solutions.

But then, within the 55-man limit, it was very slow going. By the end of '82, early '83, I was afraid that the whole thing was about to go down the tubes, and I reported that to Washington, to the JCS. They sent me to the State Department—to the so-called core group—at that time, to give them my estimate; they sent me on to the White House. I'll never forget it. On the 26th of January of 1983 I told Judge Clark that if we did not step up our effort and make a commitment that was visible, the thing was going to go down the tubes. That got people excited!

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

We were able to establish the Regional Military Training Center in Honduras, as a means of enhancing output because we couldn't do enough in Salvador under the 55-man limit. Additional resources came with General Gorman\* when we changed command in May of '83 and, finally, everything together started to make a difference.

### *Training Was Critical*

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—It [reform of the military] was an attitudinal problem that ran through the human rights death squad issue. The military and security forces were unfortunately not as clean as they should have been through the continuing struggle. There were all kinds of efforts by Mil Group commanders, both to try to reform the way the war was conducted and to get people off of their butts and out of the *cuarteles* [barracks]. They have succeeded at long last. By the time I left, it seemed to me it was still in doubt as to whether the Salvadoran Army would ever be an effective field force. Certainly training was critical: training in the States, the original training of their action battalions in El Salvador, the eventual creation of a regional military training center. Trying to get an army that had always thought that if it ever fought, it would fight for 48 hours against the Hondurans, to recognize that it had a continuing relentless struggle against a very determined and able group of guerrillas.

My own impression and maybe there are cases you could cite that would joggle my memory—but two reaction battalions already had been trained or had just finished training when I got there, and as far as I could see, they lacked the concept of immediate reaction. We later pressed of course for nationwide recruit training or a recruit training center which was different from the way they traditionally did it. They did it by training

\*General Paul Gorman, Commander-In-Chief, United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), 1983-1985.

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.



recruits in their units. My own impression was that they agreed that a national center was desirable and the right way to go, but there were a lot of practical difficulties, with recruit training. Since I went through recruit training (in 1943), that seemed the reasonable thing to do; certainly it was U.S. doctrine, and I can't recall that there was any real resistance on the grounds that this isn't the way we Salvadorans do things. The problem was where the facility was going to be? That's the sort of emotional issue that arose—I may be wrong. They were . . . resistant, of course, to the idea that Salvadorans should be trained in Honduras. That was an idea they did not take kindly to. I guess it was eventually done to some extent.

Part of the problem about a recruit center in El Salvador arose from the congressional limit on the number of American trainers you could have in El Salvador. Congress wouldn't budge. There was a limit as to what we could put in El Salvador. This was a problem in the conduct of almost all operations. Sit there and it was like a football team that has 45 or 55 players, and you must shuffle them in and out (of El Salvador) of the lineup. There were days when we had to stay within the ceiling, to send trainers out so we could get people in, because we needed even more. Peculiar way to run a ball game.

### ***U.S. Training of Salvadoran Units and Cadets***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—Back in '81 we sent a mobile training team (MTT) in and trained the Atlacatl Battalion which is still the best unit in the country. We trained a 600-man battalion, and then we looked around to try to train another one, but we didn't have the cushion in the 55-man limit. It didn't allow us to bring enough trainers in to train another battalion. By that time the program had expanded. We had Air Force and Navy MTTs, and we were doing other things. There just weren't the spaces.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

You couldn't bring in a 40- or 50-man MTT, or whatever it would take. Once we sat down and figured that it would take 50 to 60 trainers to train a battalion, if they didn't have any housekeeping duties and stuck strictly to training. There wasn't room for them in-country because of the 55-man limit, so they looked around for other locations. You couldn't take them to Panama. Obviously that's politically unacceptable to bring in 600-700 Salvadorans to Panama to train them. You can't train them in-country, so the only option at that time was to take them to the United States and pay top dollar. It cost \$8,000,000 to train the BELLOSO Battalion in the United States. I could have trained and equipped six to eight battalions for the price of one if we could have done it in-country.

One of the advantages of training a battalion outside of Salvador was that we were able to train the battalion commander and his staff ... not formally as such, but because of the environment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the battalion commander and his staff had to wrestle with training problems, with coordination for training areas, for ammunition, etc. All the things that you do in the training environment (obviously without the stress, the problems and the casualties), your staff does similar type work in combat. Nevertheless, the S-4 (logistics) has to function like an S-4; the S-1 has to take care of the personnel. All of that was done at Fort Bragg in a training environment. When you train a battalion in-country, the officers are usually doing other things. They are not being trained as such, and that was the one advantage of going to the States. There we had the whole battalion as a package and trained them from the top down.

We tried to train another IR (Immediate Reaction) battalion in El Salvador and had the same kind of problems we had had with the IR battalion we tried to train in El Salvador in '82. During the elections it was constantly being pulled out, and they had a lot of problems getting it trained. It never really did get up to standards—distractions were constant. In '83 we started to train another one, and we had the same kind of problems. Again, we didn't have enough trainers in-country so they took the Atonal Battalion over to the regional training center and

finished up the training. We have since trained a couple more there. I was not overly enamored with the Fort Benning, Georgia, training program. I thought it was conventional OCS (Officer Candidate School), war-in-Europe type training. I'm not the only one who was critical of it. The leadership aspect of it was superb, but they didn't get enough counterinsurgency, small unit tactics, or night operations. Having said that—we were more interested quite frankly in the long-range ramifications of breaking the cycle of the four-year military academy. When we sent the first group of 470 cadets to Fort Benning we had essentially cracked the facade of the academy. There were attempts to re-blue these guys, to take them back to the academy after we got through with them, but after they had been in the field for awhile and had proven themselves, none of the departmental commanders wanted to give up "their cadets." Initially, however, there was the view that "these cadets are all gringo-trained, and we are going to have to retrain them in the Salvadoran mode. We don't trust them. They don't know how to really be soldiers." They didn't know a lot about the parade ground, how to do push-ups and squat jumps, and a lot of the things taught them in the academy. But they knew how to lead in the field. They took their lumps. They took their casualties, and they proved themselves.

## *Two Overviews of U.S. Support*

**General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova**—When the reforms came in '79 we had a professional armed force, but it was divided. There was constant quarreling at the higher echelons of the armed forces. There were constant arguments, internal struggle for power and higher positions within the forces and also an ideological struggle. We were not aware of what was really coming and what we were about to face on 10 January 1981, the "final" offensive. We did not know how

General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987.

much support the people were going to give to the armed forces. The insurgents claimed it would take them only 15 days to completely destroy the armed forces and gain absolute control over the country. Those were the longest 15 days they ever had to deal with because they underestimated the armed forces' capability even though we only had 14,000 to 15,000 men. If the insurgent forces would have had the complete support of the people at the time they would have inevitably won. However, the armed forces with their own resources were able to go ahead and defeat the insurgents. After this incident President Carter announced his intentions to provide aid to El Salvador. I think he gave us some 10 million dollars. But I think what was most important was being able to say, "I don't want another Nicaragua." There was a significant change after this, and it was when we started to receive aid from the United States.

***Dr. Alvaro Magaña***—In 1981 there was still not a serious commitment to provide military aid. I think what we received initially, during my tenure, were 37 million dollars.

By the time I left office we were receiving more than 300 million. It was a significant improvement. That is why we were able to increase our Army personnel from 15,000 to 45,000. You know what it is to equip that number of soldiers. Now, what I think was the most important were the relationships between the two Ambassadors from the United States during my tenure, Deane Hinton and Tom Pickering. In addition to being highly professional and very responsible, they worked 24 hours a day for El Salvador, and we established some very good, friendly relationships. They would call us up at 11:00 P.M., and we would call them up at 12:00, that sort of thing. That, undoubtedly, helped me tremendously. I had no complaints with respect to that situation. I can say it over and over again—that the attitude of the U.S. Government, during my tenure as Interim President, was what definitely saved this country.

Dr. Alvaro Magaña, provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986 and 30 June 1987.

## ***Problems in Coordinating U.S. Support Efforts***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—Policy formulation and policy execution for me was a total frustration. I said earlier that every time I went to Washington I tried to gauge those visits to have some impact. I didn't want to be there all the time. I wanted to go when it appeared that I could use a lever or a hammer to achieve something. And each time I went, I made the rounds of various offices in DOD, CIA, State ARA, and the NSC. I may have gone to the NSC and to those other places without formal clearance or blessing from DOD. But I felt it was my mission to try to articulate my concerns throughout the government, because it was a lot more than just a military problem. What I ran into, as I made the rounds in Washington, was a total lack of coherence. People in Washington, wherever they are, are focused on the immediate fire. No long-range view; no ability to take a long-range view. Just put out today's fire and hope for the best tomorrow. Meetings are always interrupted by phone calls, and people have to go to other meetings and those kinds of things. It was just a general lack of attention to this particular problem because it was perceived by most people to be a very low priority or a tar-baby that they wanted to have nothing to do with.

**Colonel John Cash**—General Nutting, his staff, all of his officers, myself, a couple of attachés, and members of the various other offices in the Embassy sat around for about two or three hours discussing what was going on—Mil Group options. It finally got to the acrimonious level, and General Nutting turned to the Ambassador. "Damn it, Mr. Ambassador, what

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

Colonel John Cash, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1981 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 20 March 1987.

the hell do you think we're here for?" And Ambassador Hinton said, "I'm here to hold on." General Nutting said, "I've been told that we're here to win." And then we all kind of looked at each other and said maybe we've got some basic philosophical disagreement.

**Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III**—Ambassador Hinton had never been given instructions to win the war. He had been given instructions to maintain the status quo and not let the thing slide. But when Ambassador Pickering came in, the game plan had very evidently changed. His first words to me (but not his first words because we had a very exciting first night, but very shortly thereafter) were, "I want you to get Fred Woerner up here, and I want a strategy for bringing 90 percent of the terrain and population under control of the government in two years and marginalizing his [the subversives] front."

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—But you didn't have anything between the NSC and the country team that allowed for any unity of command. You didn't have a regional political State Department offensive for Central America. You have a POLAD (representative of Department of State) at SOUTHCOM, but he didn't function as the senior guy on the scene, the equivalent of a CINC. You didn't have anything at State Department in those days that really fused the military and the political. Sure you had military guys that were up there, but there wasn't the same feeling that, "Hey we are managing policy from the connecting links between NSC and the country team." You had a total disconnect.

Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1983 to 1984, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 29 May 1985.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

***The Need for a Rational,  
Coherent Process by Which  
Aid Can Be Provided***

**Major General James R. Taylor**—Well, the first thing needed would be a change to the Arms Export Control Act and to change that system so that we approach the provisioning of MAP and MIF dollars and FMS dollars on a more rational and coherent basis rather than an irrational emotional basis. And two, in the process as you change those two laws, build a system that is more responsive but still provides the same intent of the Congress—oversight. Right now it's a bureaucratic jungle, and you can't get from here to there because of all of the control mechanisms, all of which are well-intentioned and responding to the intent of the Congress. But we have regulated ourselves almost out of business and do not, in fact, support the Commander in Chief of the unified command that's responsible for the provisioning or the administration of that program. It's designed both on the congressional side of the house and the DOD side of the house to support the bureaucracy. It's one of those self-generating bureaucratic kinds of structures where there is so much notification required and so much else required that, by the time you get what it is that you need, it is too late. And in our efforts to make sure that we never sell anything for less than it cost us, we don't ever sell things that we need to sell when we need to sell them.

Major General James R. Taylor, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama), 1986 to 1987, interviewed at Fort Amador, Republic of Panama, 14 December 1986.

***The United States Needs People  
Capable of Analyzing and  
Understanding a Problem Like  
the Salvadoran War***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—You have got to be able to do the analysis necessary to come up with some proposed courses of action. You know, there's nothing magic in this. The problem is that to arrive at the same conclusion, you have to understand what's pushing it. You can't look at El Salvador if you don't understand the *Matanza*.<sup>\*</sup> You can't look at El Salvador unless you understand the impact of the Soccer War. You can't look at El Salvador unless you understand the population pressures, land distribution, pre-revolutionary situation. You can't look at El Salvador unless you understand why they are the way they are, why the insurgents are doing what they're doing. In any situation like this you really have to do your homework first. Once you do that, from the military side you've got to understand the organization and why they're organized that way, what the historical precedences are, why they have a *tanda* system, or whatever system they have. What's the relationship between the officers and the troops? What do the troops do day to day? How responsive are they? How brave are the soldiers? With the right kind of training are they capable of taking on the guerrillas head on? What are the relationships of the population toward the military? Do they view the military as the reason for the problems or as a possible solution for the problem? You have to do your homework, do an analysis and really understand the nature of the beast you are going to be dealing with. And not be afraid to say what's right and what is wrong and if there's an impediment.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

<sup>\*</sup>The *Matanza* (massacre) of between 10,000 and 30,000 people in El Salvador in 1932—a demonstration of the misuse of oligarchic power and military brutality.



## ***Continuity of Personnel Is Important***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—You have to begin with personnel programs that provide for repetitive tours and experience and contacts with foreigners in their areas of expertise and interest. But you have to put people in those jobs and leave them there long enough to know what it is they're trying to do. To build positive relationships with their counterparts in El Salvador and Honduras, for example. You can't do it on TDY in 89 days. You can't do it in 179 days. Most people in uniform acknowledge that if there's a war going on, they are obligated to serve. The trouble is that we have not yet understood or accepted the fact that low-intensity conflict is the preferred modern form of aggression that we see most frequently in the latter part of this century. And, therefore, the Army and the other services, you know, treat a tour, 179-day or 89-day tour in Honduras, as an aberration. Well, bullshit. It's a wartime assignment. It's got to be long enough to be productive for the individual and his job and so forth. It makes it hard on families. So was WWII, but we found ways to do it. And it doesn't have to be all soldiers to do those kinds of things. There must be economists and politicians, psychological warriors, all those kinds of people that work together in all the dimensions to help solve the problem. It's personnel policies that have to be changed to help institutionalize that experience.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—The other thing that I fought like hell for, and had an enormous problem with, was longer tours for military people. I felt that we were constantly running people through there who had to relearn. The one-year tour did not become effective for four to six months, and it was a tragedy that we did this. We didn't have that many people who wanted to come, first, and secondly, we didn't have that

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

many people who could pick up as rapidly on what their predecessors had done, so in a sense we were constantly relearning old lessons. The notion that we could bring people out for longer and build into the system some institutional knowledge was another key to how we pushed the peanut ahead.

### ***Neither the Doctrine, Support, nor Coordination to Be Effective***

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—I felt that when I arrived we were dealing with a phenomenon that we had faced before, yet we had very little recorded information to reflect our past historical experience. One of the first things I did was to get together a conference in the State Department, with the help of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, of about a dozen and a half, two dozen individuals from many different facets of activity, to look first at the military situation and then later at some of the political and economic activities. Their experiences were easily applicable to El Salvador.

We discovered a combination of not knowing the lessons we should have learned from past experience on the one hand and having to adapt ourselves to somewhat different and new situations on the other. It was a tragedy that there was no respectable body of doctrine to be drawn on, that we were thrown back onto pragmatism. We had no respectable organizational approach to deal with this. In a sense, the Embassy played a key coordinating role. We had, because of the personalities involved and a commitment, an unusually good relationship with the Southern Command. We had a certain amount of independence in AID in terms of being able to direct our funding. But, nowhere in the U.S. Government do we have basically, in any way that I know of, this sort of center of focus. I went through a lot of literature, because, while I had had some experience in this kind of situation, I wanted to try to get some grip on the wide range of possible experiences and answers both

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

doctrinally and pragmatically. I went to things like the intelligence assessments of past counterinsurgencies and worked very closely with the people who had the expertise. But I found, we really had a very sluggish bureaucracy. We had to make a tremendous effort because there was no central area of authority in organizing ourselves. We were conducting the activities in El Salvador on a business-as-usual basis. Though we were a squeaky hinge, and got a little more oil, nobody saw this as such a powerful and overwhelming national objective to the extent that we could count on the full weight of American backing being put behind it.

One of our public relations and public affairs activities was to try to do as much as we could from El Salvador in informing the American public about what was going on, in order to build up backing in the Congress, which under normal conditions, you'd assume you have when a national decision to deal with the problem has already been made. I spent most of my time with the press, dealing with issues on the record. We wanted, first, to build confidence that we knew what we were about, then second, some confidence that we were making slow but steady progress, that we were aware of a wide-range of issues, and lastly, that we were trying to deal with the problems that everybody was constantly complaining about rather than ignoring them or brushing them aside.

We had a certain amount of success over the two years—partly through this campaign, partly through the elections, partly through the Congress, partly through public exposure of national figures down there, partly through all kinds of contacts—in beginning to develop a slight turnaround in public support and confidence, which is really essential. So, we had neither the doctrine nor the support nor the coordination in the U.S. Government that would really be required to deal effectively with that kind of operation. I don't think we ever developed it. We still are kind of ad hoc in our way of viewing the problem. That is really quite a critical comment. The fact that we were reasonably successful has very little to do with the fact that we had previously developed the answers to those issues, and in effect we were often condemned to reinventing a

lot of them. In a way, we were unhampered by doctrinal preconceptions, and that helped in pragmatism and flexibility, but in another sense this made it very difficult to stay the course, to know what other things happened, to do all of the things that had to be done all at once.

### ***Comments on the Period of Insurgent Ascendancy—A Look at Dismounted Knights and a Few Other Things***

THE EDITORS—The insurgent political leaders well understood the importance of moral power in the strategy of conflict. They were also responsive to the need to completely operationalize the classical principle of unity of command in war. Nevertheless, the more military-oriented leadership prevailed. They elected to pursue a military victory over what was perceived to be a completely incompetent enemy—the regular Salvadoran armed forces.

Thus, despite the failure of what was to be the “Final Offensive” of January 1981, the FDR/FMLN had sufficient organizational unity, manpower, arms, sanctuaries, and outside support to generate a more-or-less continuous and growing military effort from the end of 1981 to the end of 1984. During that period they were able to organize, train, and logistically support units that were capable of mounting attacks with as many as 600 men at virtually any time. Given the admittedly poor support provided to the insurgency on the part of the Salvadoran people, the ability to achieve this level of warfare is remarkable. This degree of military capability can only be explained in terms of the extremely high level of external support enjoyed by the FDR/FMLN.

Although this guerrilla ascendancy was the most obvious and best reported aspect of the period, the other parties to the conflict were not inactive. In a struggle for the “hearts and minds” of a people, the

fundamental question is one of the moral right to govern. This is the hub of all power and movement on which everything depends. And, it was here that the government response began. That is to say that while the "revolutionaries" were concentrating their efforts on the military aspects of the war, the Salvadoran civil-military leadership made the strategic dimension of gaining legitimacy—and, thus, internal and external support—their first priority.

As a consequence, one of the first things the Junta did on taking control of the government after the 1979 coup was to announce land, banking, and commodity export reforms. Subsequently, other reforms were promulgated—not the least of which were popular elections that really mattered. The degree of success the reforms may or may not enjoy is moot. The point is that enough people were sufficiently convinced of the progress of the situation that they did not support the revolutionary cause to any extent that might have been expected.

In military terms, the armed forces' leadership responded to the legitimization process on at least two levels. First, they joined with the civilians in an alliance to support the democratic process. As a result, the military went to extreme lengths to provide security for free elections and has consistently demonstrated loyalty to civilian institutions—particularly to the Office of the Presidency. This in itself was probably the most significant reform of the decade.

Second, the military leadership understood that this type of war is fought on diverse fronts and that soldiers and officers had to do more than shoot people in order to win the long-term struggle. Thus, they would take the necessary time and resources to change a "Praetorian Guard," accustomed to abusing its authority, into a more professional organization that could engage an enemy force without alienating the general citizenry. This was another significant reform with long-term, positive implications.

The primary objective of the armed forces was to ensure institutional survival by helping to promulgate and implement and to protect basic civil reforms. At the same time, equally important, they began to reform and professionalize themselves. All while increasing in size from about 14,000 to over 50,000 personnel, developing the requisite small-unit leadership crucial to counterinsurgency and fighting a relatively intense war. At that point in time, the primary center of gravity was not a piece of territory or the enemy force; it was the basic underpinnings of the government itself.

During the period of insurgent ascendancy, the United States did not demonstrate the ability to provide any kind of consistent assistance to El Salvador. At least a few senior decisionmakers were not particularly concerned. They had assumed that once the United States had showed that they were semi-reliable and were prepared to provide some help, the guerrilla movement would see the inevitability of defeat and simply go away. What this perception did not take into account was the ideological commitment of the insurgent leadership, and the strategic importance of the Vietnamese-Nicaraguan-Cuban-Soviet connections. In short, there was no thorough analysis or appreciation of the situation in Washington. Having said all that, it is necessary to point out that despite the fact that the Salvadorans "never knew when the next shipment of ammunition would arrive" or what they could plan on in terms of other assistance, U.S. aid was as important to the government as the external support was to the insurgents.

In summarizing this seemingly dark period in the history of the conflict in El Salvador, three things stand out in strategic perspective. First, legitimacy is reaffirmed as the first center of gravity—the fundamental factor that would be in the long term more decisive than traditional military action. The government and the military got off to an apparently slow start in the

war against the insurgents but began the process of seizing the "moral high ground." On the other hand, the *comandantes* of the FMLN chose to ignore the council so generously provided by Lenin, Mao, Giap, and their own "politicos."

Second, the classical principles of unity of command and objective were also reaffirmed. Both sides to the conflict organized to the degree necessary for survival and perhaps even for moderate success but not to the extent required for either to win. Neither of the combatants developed an organization at a sufficiently high level or gave it the authority necessary to coordinate and effect a winning set of strategic military-political objectives.

Third, outside aid made the guerrilla ascendancy possible. By the same token, U.S. aid probably saved the incumbent Salvadoran government. The major lesson learned here is that the center of gravity in this context of the war is not the assistance itself or the routes that assistance might take to get to the battlefield. Rather, the center of gravity is the source of whatever support that might be provided. As a result, the insurgents' efforts to stem U.S. aid and government efforts to obtain that help centered on the proverbial corridors of power in Washington. On the other side of the coin, neither the United States nor the Salvadoran governments seriously addressed the external sources of insurgent support which gave them the physical strength and psychological balance to ascend.

Finally, an ancillary lesson learned was that a regime under violent attack, under the microscope of the world press, with less than stable or consistent external support, can develop and implement major social and institutional democratic reforms.

*Part IV*

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*War Changes Direction:  
Late 1984  
to Late 1986*



## *Military and Political Centers of Gravity*

THE EDITORS—By the end of 1984, there was a general consensus that the military aspects of the war had turned around. There was also consensus that winning the military war was only part of the struggle. As President Duarte gained the confidence of and confidence in the military, his focus shifted somewhat from the military situation to the political aspects of the country's struggle. This shift was especially true after the 1985 Assembly elections which gave the Christian Democrats a majority. Avoiding a split, which the insurgents hoped to cause by the kidnapping of Duarte's daughter and subsequent ransom negotiations, the military and Duarte struggled together to come to terms with the new concepts of pluralism they had instituted and had sworn to protect.

### *Assailed by Every Conceivable Problem*

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—Our principal problems in the two years that I was there were (1) to deal with the military situation on the ground and (2) to deal with the economic, social,

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

and political situation. (In each case we had a series of efforts partly at least coordinated to try to work on it.) On the military side, we focused heavily on training, on re-equipping with the appropriate weapons, on getting the money in order to do that, on bringing the Congress along, and on building leadership in the Salvadoran military—one that could handle the problems and develop a series of tactical and strategic approaches to try to deal with the guerrilla effort as a military and political-military activity. Since the guerrillas were nearly in an open-war phase, it was possible to see guerrilla units at levels of multibattalion strength. We estimated that perhaps, on some battlefields, they may have been able to mass as many as a thousand fighters against government units—and they were particularly successful in wiping out government units.

Well, we may have overestimated the manpower strength because the losses were so great. Everybody has a tendency to do that. Nevertheless, there were large units. The whole strategy that developed in the early stages and which proved quite successful was to begin a process of being able to deal with guerrilla units at that level and then to move further on down into being able to handle more dispersed, more broken up guerrilla units. We put a heavy focus on intelligence collection and building Salvadoran capabilities as well as integrating our own, particularly technical intelligence collection, which was of immediate use. But in a sense we were assailed on every side by every conceivable kind of problem, and we had no choice but to try to attack most of the major pressing problems at once. There were four or five, maybe six or seven, major priority tasks on the military side which had to be dealt with on a kind of emergency basis. We had to accept *rough* strategic objectives and to mold tactical approaches to them as we went along. We began to make an ad hoc series of tactical efforts, some of which worked and some of which didn't work. On the economic side, we had to find ways to try to stabilize the economy, to handle the massive social problems—the refugees and other issues—and to get more money. In a way, the money depended, both on the military and the economic sides, on the kind of

confidence the Congress had in the political situation in the country. As a result the military, economic, and political issues were directly interlinked. Military failure meant congressional discouragement. Likewise, political problems—human rights abuses and social dislocation, stagnation, and a strong sense that the government was either out of control or dominated by individuals whose capacity to deal with these problems across the board was distinctly limited both politically and economically—meant that we could not garner the kind of congressional support that we needed. In addition, the country was headed into an election arrangement that posed enormous dangers in two or three ways. On the military side, the prior elections that took place in '82 had been partly blocked by guerrilla military activities on the ground, and so were less successful than they should have been. On the political side, there were deep uncertainties whether elections would work, whether you would get a turnout.

Obviously there were deep concerns about what the results would be. There were chances that the two right-wing parties would merge and adopt an extremist platform which would mean that broad political support from the United States would die out. It wasn't certain that Duarte and his more middle-of-the-road people really could appeal to the voting public and indeed offset the monetary, military, thug-type pressures of both the Right and the Left to influence the voter outcome. And finally, there was a really important question as to whether the Left could capture the labor movement or whether Duarte and his people could maintain their contacts and hold some solidarity with the labor movement. That solidarity only developed slowly. The labor movement, in a sense, refused to make a deal with Duarte in the first of the elections but did join him in the second runoff elections. So we had an enormous series of problems across the board. In addition, we had a real struggle to try to develop a political-military-economic development strategy, particularly for the rural areas under guerrilla control. In that sense there were many villages that were not defended.

## ***The War Had Turned Around***

**General John R. Galvin**—By the time I took over as CINC USSOUTHCOM, the war had been turned around with a lot of help and guidance, in my opinion, from Paul Gorman. But it wasn't just Paul. Ambassador Pickering was a very astute individual, and he was followed by Ed Corr, an equally good, if not better, ambassador. Corr, who came in soon after I did, has a military background and has a very good understanding of the overall question of what to do in El Salvador. What to do was, in my opinion, to ensure that the entire country was dedicated to fighting the insurgency, getting rid of the insurgency, and reestablishing, in an even better form, a democratic government. When I say "an even better form," it wasn't a democratic government 10 years earlier, and an "even a better form" of democracy was what President Duarte wanted to establish. The thing that I think was established during my period there—not by me but by a team of people that included myself, Ed Corr, President Duarte, Vides Casanova, and Blandón and many others—was the idea of an all-out war of the people of El Salvador against the Marxist guerrillas. That was the country plan, which was known as *Unidos Para Reconstruir*, which brought in every government ministry doing its part to try to put down the insurgency and bring peace to the country. Militarily, when I arrived, El Salvador was doing fairly well already. But it was obvious that you could not win the war by a military fight alone; you had to enlist all aspects, all facets of the country. President Duarte, when he became convinced of this, went out and made a series of speeches. Every weekend he was out on the stump in different parts of the country telling the people that the war could not be won unless the people dedicated themselves to winning it. He was absolutely right.

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

## *The Military Situation*

**Colonel James J. Steele**—What we've seen since 1984, from a political/military perspective, are the beginnings of consolidation of democracy. Early on the President focused very heavily on cementing a workable relationship with the military. His first priority clearly was the war, and that meant making sure that he was in the position where he could influence and work well with the military. His early actions were very positive. When he assumed the presidency in 1984, the military was very suspicious of him.

It's always a mistake to talk about the military as a totally cohesive element, but there was a lot of suspicion of Duarte within the military. However, within several months he did a good job of reassuring those who were very suspicious that, in fact, he was not going to turn the country over to the Communists.

Even though many had predicted that the military would never let Duarte take office, obviously they did, and their attitude became one of acceptance and even of seeing Duarte as a positive influence. He represented, first of all, tremendous external support. They knew that and they needed that in the military; so, there was a marriage. Both needed the other, and that brought the country along pretty well. That continued even through the Assembly elections. Then we saw the Duarte focus shift a little bit, from the military and preoccupation with the war effort, to probably what was his secondary priority—the political situation of the country. He focused on that. His party did very well in the Assembly elections in 1985. Again, I think it was a product of his own personal priorities and efforts. Early on, we saw very little focus on the civilian government side towards economic problems in the country. The priorities were military and political. The time when Duarte took a bit of a nose dive with the military was over the kidnapping (of Inés

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5–10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

Guadalupe) issue. It would be wrong to think that the military was totally against any kind of negotiations. In fact, there was an acceptance that it was difficult for many of us to understand.

When Duarte's daughter was kidnapped, it was almost an easy acceptance that, "Well, this is certainly going to result in negotiations and some trades," because that's almost a way of life in El Salvador. Many families have been touched by kidnappings, and ransoms have been paid, and it's an accepted thing. When it really hit the military, though, was when she was released in exchange for an awful lot of guerrilla leadership and wounded. They paid a tremendous price in the process of this exchange. But they held together very well. They were supportive of Duarte, not so much because they believed that he had done the right thing with negotiations, but they recognized that one of the goals of the FMLN, in this whole kidnapping affair, was to try to split or drive a wedge between Duarte, the civilian side of the government, and the military. They weren't about to play into the guerrillas' hands. What ended up happening was that the military went along with it, but it did mark a low in terms of his relationship with the military. Since then, it's improved. Economic considerations have come to the forefront this year. He's enacted a series of economic measures, austerity measures, which have not been very popular. And, he's been subject of some criticism over that. At this point his relationship with the military is probably as good as you could expect it to be. There is a new effort now, as a result of the National Plan (Unidos Para Reconstruir), which although designed by the military, it's purpose is to integrate what the military was doing with what the civilian side of the government was doing, in trying to implement national strategy. Duarte has been very effective in implementing that program. The way he deals with the military has been interesting to watch because he has consistently, when they've inaugurated projects under this plan, attempted to put the military people into a position where they were up front and giving speeches and so on. In doing so, I think it reaffirms their role in protecting democracy.

## ***The Internal Political Environment***

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—Now we have a president from the Christian Democrats, for instance, with a National Assembly in which the Christian Democrats have a majority and still they have to deal with viewpoints from the Right. They still have to work to get the votes they need for the policies of the President. Even though the Christian Democrats have an absolute majority in the National Assembly, their margin of control is very small, and some accommodation with the Right is necessary to assure passage of their policies. In any event, by the tradition of Latin policies, they feel constrained to seek a broader consensus than their slight voting majority. At the same time, the military feels that it doesn't get all of the support that it would like to get from the civilian government and laments the fact that things take longer to accomplish with a democracy than they do under a government that has all of the power in their hands. They are struggling to come to terms with pluralism, and they're struggling to do this with a society that is, to a large extent, polarized.

## ***Evolution and Political Awareness***

**General Adolfo Blandón**—Before 1979 our Army was composed of approximately 12,000 men; 12,000 men who had been trained for conventional warfare and had very little knowledge of an irregular war. Our evolution is based on a dynamic system we developed in the tactical sense. During the course of this war, we've had to make various changes on a daily basis. But motivation has been our greatest advantage. The fact that we know that we have to save this country from

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

General Adolfo Onecífero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.

the pretensions of the Soviet bloc of conquering this country. Knowing what it's like to live in a democracy—with liberty, justice, and opportunity for all—and making our officers understand the true purpose behind this struggle have been our biggest cornerstone. I think we are very well equipped, very well trained, very well organized. We have tremendous aerial support with experienced pilots, which I don't think are anywhere else in Latin America with the same experience and courage. We have an artillery brigade with an extraordinary experience. These artillery men fire a projectile only some 5 to 10 meters away from their target. I know that for a fact. But I think that the most important aspect of our evolution as an Army and inclusive, all our armed forces, is the understanding of what it has meant to be alienated from politics. That was extremely harmful to us.

Unfortunately, we were used as instruments for the politicians—a military president would be elected, and we would appear in the eyes of the world as a military government. But the truth of the matter is that the president was a military man surrounded by civilians. Therefore, to say it was a *military* government in El Salvador was only a front. The president would act as a figurehead, puppet, and the true governing body was composed of an elite sector, which practically ruled the entire country. When these people did not like a president's attitude—whom they themselves had originally appointed—they'd promote a coup within the Army and, thus, assign another one to the position who would satisfy their purposes. Now that we have allowed the people to elect their own government, we have won moral authority, and we have won just recognition, I think, on the part of the people. We have also received international recognition. A government can be either good or bad, but whoever decides to change it should not be the armed forces but, rather, the people. It hasn't been easy to inculcate the concept of democracy into the minds of our officers. Actually, it has been extremely difficult. But we've been lucky—for reasons of fate, the will of God, because God wants to save this country—that four people who share the same beliefs were assigned command positions: General Vides, Flores



Lima, Colonel López Nuila, and myself. We have worked together sharing and implementing those beliefs. At work, we've served as examples by using harmony, austerity, and, thus, preaching with those examples. We've managed to secure a valid official status which can operate during this country's historic moment. Tomorrow we are supposed to conclude a military operation which has lasted 60 days—the Operation Domingo Monterosa. The officiality has requested me to continue the operation. Imagine what it must be like for an officer, a soldier, or a corporal, having sacrificed 60 days of his life and finding out he has to extend his days because someone said, "Hey, this is such a great operation we have to continue doing it?" That calls for a lot of extra effort, sacrifice, and professionalism that we have dedicated. There is also a profound sense of understanding as to the significance of human rights. I am in no way implying that we are perfect yet.

There is still a lot to accomplish with respect to that. It makes it difficult when we have to command 52,000 or so soldiers. It happens anywhere in the world where wars of this type are being fought.

But we have improved tremendously. The last notice on the human rights issue was delivered by Ruiz Rejo at the United Nations. The notice was very favorable for El Salvador. We have supported all of the efforts made by the President of the Republic in order to achieve peace through dialogue. At the United Nations, we were very much surprised to hear when the President announced his intentions to pursue the famous dialogue in La Palma. Four days ago I held a news conference. I was approached by a reporter who asked me, "General, throughout the entire world it is being said that you, the military, are still giving orders to the President." "That is false," I said. "We do not give orders to the President of the Republic. He is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and he is in command, and according to the political constitution, he is responsible for conducting the war, and he is responsible for achieving peace. We, as military units, are responsible for conducting the battles, the engagements, but the war is lead by him. We have supported and backed the

President in these efforts, and we have also backed him in the struggle to humanize the war.”

### ***Guerrilla Politics Is Part of the Equation***

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—The major ingredient of this war is politics. It is the ambition for power and complete domination by the leaders such as Ungo, who tried to run for the presidency three or four times. He was at one time President Duarte’s running mate, but he was frustrated at the outcome of those elections. The five guerrilla leaders are frustrated students who lead a series of strikes at the universities and thus wanted to achieve political power. They are not really interested in the social-economic conditions of the country. They are petit-bourgeoisies who launched themselves into a political struggle. Each group follows a different philosophy and abides by different rules and leaders. For example, the ERP calls for hegemony, but they will never agree with the doctrine of the FPL. They have killed each other. The death of Cayetano Carpio is an example. The RN was born as a result of a split among the leaders of the ERP. They killed one in Mexico. The PRTC was born as a result of a divergency among the ERP. The ERP was born as a result of a divergency among the FPL. In other words, there is too much personal ambition, and they will never agree to anything among themselves. The creation of the FMLN was forced by Fidel Castro. He threatened to cut off all support if they did not unite under one force. But then, the FPL decided that a percentage of the aid collected by the FMLN would go to them. Each organization now follows the same pattern and takes whatever they consider theirs. Some of these funds come from Mexico and Nicaragua and then are transmitted to the PRTC. That is how the PRTC functions. The Clara Elizabeth front, which belongs to the Metropolitano, had

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

its own structure and logistic channels aside from those provided by the FMLN. But apparently, they united under one force, and the organization disappeared. The constant divergencies, personal ambition, and *caciquismo* [semifeudal exploitation] are contributing factors to debilitating the guerrilla forces and preventing their unification. Mao Tse-tung once said that in order to achieve victory in the revolutionary process, five conditions have to be met.

First, there must be a Communist party which provides the inspiration, ideology, and strategy. Second, there must be a strong armed forces—a structured military force—located on the vanguard, which abides by the regulations imposed by its party. These rebel forces will then finally be able to defeat the former regime, along with its armed forces. Third, there must be a concentration of *masas*, which will support and provide the basis for the revolutionary movement. Fourth, internal and external logistics support must be provided. And fifth, a territory, in which some control can be exercised, training can be conducted and where supplies received from abroad can be manipulated, must be available.

Unfortunately for them but fortunately for us, there are only five parties, along with five armed forces in El Salvador. The *masas* are almost completely debilitated. In 1985, their greatest move, strategically, was the May 1 Committee. This was an attempt to bring together all of the *masas*, workers, *campesinos*, and students. It was never successful, and in the end it was dissolved. In 1986, they created the Union de Trabajadores Salvadoreños, UNTC (Salvadoran Workers Union). Supposedly, this organization has managed to bring together all of the *masas*, but it has also become very weak. The last organization that was created was the Union de Política Democrática, UPD (Political Democracy Union), something or other. As you can see, they are always trying to manipulate the *masas* in some way. The only alternative they foresee for a victory is a general insurrection of the *masas*. The people no longer want to hear talks about the ideological theme of Marxism. The insurgents claim they do. But that's a lie. Maybe back in 1979 and 1980, there were many sectors who were

willing to give this ideology an opportunity, but I'm sure that is not the case today.

## ***Guerrilla Propaganda as Part of the Equation***

***Captured FMLN Document***—The prospects of our struggle to strengthen the organization and its revolutionary consciousness depend upon the political power of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. Equally, the creation of favorable conditions to counter and defeat North American military intervention are intimately related with the level of politicization of the popular sectors and their integration into the revolutionary movement.

The achievement of these objectives, in addition to the execution of the organizational tasks, [is] an important part of the effort to convince the masses of their immediate work and of their great strategic objectives.

In other words, the strategic task of organizing the masses implies at the same time propagandizing them. Both are basic tasks of the revolutionary militant. We can state that he who does not know how to make propaganda does not know how to organize. The foregoing is meaningful from the perspective that the activist or cadre who does not concern himself with making use of the technique of communicating clearly and simply to the masses the causes of the revolutionary struggle and its great objectives, and with reaching their conscience, motivating them and in this way adding human force to the process, is simply limiting and wasting his energies.

Propaganda in its various forms multiplies the effects of concrete organizational work. Graphic or written propaganda

From "Concerning Propaganda: Our Line of Propaganda," (a document presented by the Popular Revolutionary Army at the meeting of the Command of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, July 1984), in *The Comandantes Speak: The Military Strategy of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front*, translated and edited by Gabriel and Judith F. Marcella, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College, March 1987, pp. 3-8.

offers the advantage that the ideas last for a long time, and can reach everywhere, including the enemy. In any case the correct combination of propaganda with direct organizational efforts by each activist will multiply the concrete political results.

Our work or propaganda should be clear about which concrete elements should be the focus of our political messages. These should indicate clearly the concrete tasks of the masses and the expression of their principal aspirations, economic as well as political, short as well as long term.

The central aspects of our propaganda are:

- a. Propaganda to awaken class consciousness.
- b. The great aspirations of the people: the greatest program.
- c. Concrete political tasks.
- d. The struggle for immediate justice and reforms.
- e. The development of the war.
- f. Propaganda against the enemy army.

This aspect plans to demonstrate to the masses that the origin of the current political and military confrontation in our country lies in the existence of two groups with different and irreconcilable class interests. On the one hand are the imperialist North Americans and the millionaire oligarchs—the high expression of the dominant class, combined with their followers and defenders—and on the other are the workers (laborers and peasants) and the people in general.

We seek to awaken the masses' consciousness about their situation in the social structure and to motivate them to join the group that corresponds to them: the Revolutionary Movement. Class propaganda has great power, it has an enormous influence on the points of view it originates, since it is based on the objective reality of the country.

All the enemy plans that are based on superficial and weak reasoning are disarmed; for example, the foreign origin of the war and the FMLN, the defense of democracy by the Army, etc.

The graphic use of the terms "rich" and "poor" or "the Army of the rich" and "the Army of the poor" makes our ideas understandable and awakens sympathy among the masses who have not had direct contact with our forces.

The same result is generated by pointing out the exploitation of the workers—along with its consequences of misery and humiliation, as the fundamental cause of the differences between the rich and the poor.

To support these assertions we must use concrete data and statistics which prove precisely the validity of our class arguments and indicate the abysmal contrast of the conditions of life (health, education, housing, family income, wealth, etc.) between the people and the oligarchs, and the landowners.

Class propaganda has an important formation effect upon the population, as well as upon our internal structures which also hear it and have to diffuse it. It arouses such clarity and motivation that it provokes radicalism, class hatred, willingness to fight and spirit of sacrifice.

Similarly, propaganda has the power to affect the Army troops, who are doubly exploited and oppressed. It can awaken their conscience, weaken their morale and break up the ideological work of the enemy, which is based on false and abstract arguments. With the increase of our class focus in the propaganda against the enemy, Monterrosa has made public defensive declarations that state that the Armed Forces do not defend privileged minorities, reflecting the explanation that he must give to the troops to keep them fighting.

From this focus on classes arises the opposition from the middle sectors or those who have expectations from the "promises" made by the regime [the government]. These advances are the result of the struggles of the Revolutionary Movement—the small apparent social and economic achievements of some sectors are the outcome of the revolutionary efforts sustained in a profound and radical way. The policies of the regime were implemented to counter these efforts and not to carry them forward. As long as the struggle of the people for justice did not come close to taking power, these banners [political symbols] remained forgotten, or better stated, condemned.

Class propaganda as consciousness raising should have an important place in our work. It is the key which will open the

door for us to win over the masses. However, we must be careful not to fall into blind radicalism, into a political vision which denies the role of other political forces and social sectors in the struggle, and denies their participation in the revolutionary political program.

Political objectives constantly appear in different ways in the struggles of the people through the decades and generations. These objectives have become permanent aspirations which are present in the conscience of the masses, especially among those who are to some degree politicized and who represent an important portion.

Our revolutionary war is sustained by historical claims for justice which possess an extraordinary attraction and following. We must multiply this force by massive diffusion of propaganda. They are all contained in our great program (document of the FMLN, program of broad participation or document of the society which we will construct from the revolutionary school) whose contents we must propagandize massively and each one of its points must be fully explained.

At the same time, to simplify almost to the level of slogans, we must tell the masses that the central objectives of the struggle of the FMLN are "the conquest of a popular democracy" (as a synthesis of the political transformations), the realization of the great economic changes, a true Agrarian Reform, for a country without oligarchs, for an army as defenders of the revolutionary conquests and national independence.

Principal aspects of the program have more direct ties with the conditions of life of various sectors of the population. This allows us to propagandize some of the concrete points which comprise these principal aspects and which have an important value and general sense of justice for the masses.

For example, the economic and social transformations imply resolving the grave problems of education, housing, health, identifying the revolutionary struggle with the resolution of those problems, and giving immediately to the masses an exact idea of the achievements of the revolution.

These achievements in health, education, and housing have particular value for the marginal sectors and the peasants who until now are the most neglected in that respect.

The problem of realizing the true Agrarian Reform acquires a special importance for the peasants because since in addition to planting the possibility of having access to the land in conditions no longer oppressive, it solves what now constitutes a source of frustration, given the demagogic and incomplete agrarian reforms of successive regimes; asserting the graphic claim "the land will belong to the person who works it" makes understandable one of the principal banners of struggle which can mobilize the 60 percent of the Salvadorean people who live on the land.

Moving to another aspect of the revolutionary program we can affirm that the problem of power in propagandistic terms can take two different forms: that of the struggle "for a Government of the people and the workers," which reflect the fundamental interests of the greatest importance within the revolutionary program, and which, stated in that way in current conditions, will have a great effect on the conscience and organization of the masses and on their interests. On the other hand, the form "Government of Broad Participation" corresponds more properly not to a concept, but to a concrete pragmatic proposal, already known, for the purpose of convincing other social and political forces that within the revolutionary program there is political space for their participation.

The formula of the Government of broad national participation is not meant for propagandistic purposes, but as a direct instrument for alliances and political agreements with other forces. Both formulas (revolutionary program and program of Broad Participation) are not contradictory, they are two different propaganda focuses of the problem of power, articulated in different environments, in order to make the process of [taking] power converge on two essential and complimentary factors—the masses and the political alliances.



## ***Guerrilla Strategy as Part of the Equation***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—If you take a snapshot of what was going on in 1982 and then what was going on in 1985 and, given the nature of the longer time in mustering large concentrations, you didn't find a repeat of Perquín or Berlin. You didn't have four or five hundred guerrillas massing for an attack. If you did, it was a rarity. It was an exception rather than commonplace. The Army had the ability to move reaction forces around the country. The people provided an early warning trip wire, and the numbers of those civil defense forces that were saved or fought to protect the area that they were in then were relieved by regular Army forces. There was an increase in this kind of sophistication and a commensurate decrease in the number of large unit operations that guerrillas were able to muster when they returned to the cities. They increased focus on the economic destruction—the telephone, the power lines, which not only puts the lights out and announces the guerrillas are at it again, but it also added impact to the impact on the economy—such as the ability to irrigate, the ability to process cotton, sugar, coffee and so forth. Those targets were never abandoned, and they just became more and more preferable by the guerrillas because the other things became more and more painful for them to try to do.

Taking Perquín and taking Berlin were propaganda ploys. Timing was always critical—critical votes in Congress, critical congressional delegations known to be in the area. I always took a look at where they spent most of their effort, and it seemed to me in '82 that they were spending most of their effort on trying to destroy the economy. I've seen very little to convince me that that still isn't their main goal. If you view the war as fundable from the Salvadoran government's point of view, it can be viewed from two sources—that which she (Salvador) can raise on the international market by virtue of sale of her

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

commodities for exchange and that which she gets from Congress. I saw the war then, and even more so now, in terms of an attack on the two sources of funding. Through Congress, they sought to attack the security assistance and economic support and to attack international support through their own economy. If you could attack one or both of those you would substantially impede Salvador's ability to conduct the war.

And of course, all this being fought in the public affairs arena. Every attack, no matter what it was—publicized. Every atrocity—publicized. Every fault in the Salvadoran government—publicized. That part of it was to convince Congressmen, who were being deluged by letters from their constituents, who were hearing from the visiting Maryknollers—who were coming in on the weekends and telling them about all the abuses of power. And knowing, from the Salvadoran's penchant for doing stupid things at the wrong time, things like the nuns' case never being brought to justice or the Sheraton murder case never being brought to justice. Constant drumbeat of what was wrong with Salvadoran society for American consumption. At the same time back home in Salvador, they were knocking down crop dusters, blowing up irrigation pipelines, burning, and blowing up railroad trains full of coffee and cotton and sugar that were trying to get to the port to be shipped overseas and so forth.

### ***U.S. Actions at the Time***

**Dr. José Z. García**—United States Vice-President George Bush was sent to San Salvador on December 11 essentially to make a deal with the armed forces. He requested several things: the arrest, exile, or retirement of military officers suspected of complicity in death squad activity; the trial of soldiers implicated in the 1980 murder of United States churchwomen by National Guardsmen and resolution of the murder of two

Dr. José Z. García provided his analysis of the situation in "El Salvador: Legitimizing the Government," *Current History* 84, no. 500 (March 1985), pp. 101-104; 135-36. Copyright 1985 by Current History, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Current History, Inc.

other United States citizens; and a repudiation of death squad activity at the highest level of the Salvadoran military high command. In return, the Reagan administration offered a substantial increase in military assistance to the Salvadoran armed forces in quantities sufficient to reduce the guerrilla insurgency to manageable proportions. A deadline of January 10—six days before the date the administration had agreed to provide evidence to Congress certifying that El Salvador was making progress on human rights—was set.

By January 6, the armed forces had accepted. The military high command signed a public statement condemning the death squads. Suspected death squad leaders (many of whose names had appeared on a list provided by Vice-President Bush) were removed from their positions. An Army captain was arrested for the 1980 murder of two United States labor leaders. More important, death squad activity began a sharp decline. During all of 1983, death squad murders averaged 140 per month. In December, 1983, there were 25 reported murders; in January, 1984, 22; in February, 58; March, 46; April, 34; May, 14; and in June, 11. Expanded military assistance from the United States was forthcoming: nearly \$200 million was approved by Congress for fiscal year 1984, double the amount given in the two-year period, 1981-1982.



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## *Army Unity and Ascendance*

### *García Replaced by Vides*

**Colonel John Cash**—Waghelstein told Flores Lima, who was the Chief of Staff, “You got a war to fight, and you can’t just let these political battles among your officer corps stop you at the war effort.” I was present and I watched Flores Lima tell him that this was more important than the war right now. This threatens the very fabric of our officer corps. Well we all know the history of it.

What was surprising was that Blandón, who was an old García crony, who always used to sit in for Flores Lima as the Chief of Staff, came in, went up there (Chalatenango) with a commission of officers, and came back and told García that Ochoa was right, and he better go out there because he was wrong and because he had no professional reputation. And, of course, we know that Vides took over around May and many things began to change. That’s when I lost all my reticence about El Salvador.

Colonel John Cash, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1981 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 20 March 1987.

## ***Vides—The Right Man at the Right Time***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—I think Vides has probably had more to do with keeping the military unified than any other single individual. He, Blandón, and Bustillo were the right people, in the right jobs, at the right times. Bustillo, keeping a tight reign on the Air Force and within the constraints in the use of air power—minimizing collateral damage, surgical use of air power. Blandón forced the commanders to get into the field to operate, to think ahead, to act rather than react. But most of all I think it was Vides who kind of just oversaw and nudged in the right places and subtly cajoled and pushed and prodded that Army into a new look at itself—its role in relationship with the people. I remember on his first tours when he went out and talked to the brigades. The things he talked about were the abuses of power, as they euphemistically call human rights violations. Sensitizing the officers and the soldiers in being part of the people. He pushed that Army and prodded that Army into doing the right thing. I think that is it, probably more than anything else.

And, he wasn't afraid to be innovative. When it came to the things at the tactical level, he didn't try to over control. If a good idea would work he'd encourage it. The role of the OPATTs, the fact that we finally got these people out to the brigades. Of course, the Salvadorans resented having just lieutenant colonels and then we downgraded them to majors so it wasn't rank heavy. But the bottom line was that we got teams working at the brigade level. The very specialized training programs that were initiated. The whole responsiveness to unconventional war counterinsurgency which García never understood.

That was a major departure. García got good marks for public affairs, for pushing the right buttons, for the land reform, for supporting the reforms, for being vocal in support of the

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

reforms. But tactically and strategically he had no vision, and he wasn't well respected by the rest of the Army. Vides Casanova was. He was a man who had come out, married into the oligarchy, had a vested interest in the old way, and yet was able to convince those same people that they needed a departure, that they needed to clean up their act.

### *Unity in the Army: An Example*

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—As negotiation over the prisoner exchange [related to the kidnapping of Duarte's daughter, Inés Guadalupe] dragged on, our political unity began to crack. The emotional empathy of the first moments after the kidnapping drained away and opportunism seeped in. Voices on the Right began to say that I wanted to save my daughter no matter what it cost the country. Other voices, trying to split the Christian Democratic Party, said I would abandon the mayors in order to free Inés Guadalupe. One newspaper published a story from the Spanish Civil War of a mayor who let his son be killed rather than give in to enemy demands. The article practically suggested I let the kidnappers murder Inés Guadalupe.

Colonel Ochoa smelled a chance to weaken my influence within the armed forces. He had cultivated the image of a tough, uncompromising guerrilla-fighter. Ochoa had led a mutiny against Defense Minister García in 1983, and had been transferred to Washington. When I became president, Generals Blandón and Bustillo argued that they needed Colonel Ochoa to take command in Chalatenango, where the guerrillas had been hitting hard, even seizing the army base there in El Paraíso. The generals said Ochoa had learned that political maneuvering was no longer acceptable in the armed forces. Colonel Ochoa himself gave me his word that his only ambition was to serve as military combatant. He promised unswerving loyalty to the democratic government.

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present), *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 256-59. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Yet, one year after aggressively taking charge of the Army troops in Chalatenango, Colonel Ochoa called in his officers to consider whether or not they approved of my policies. Combat-weary officers who had seen their comrades die in the struggle with guerrillas were asked if they approved of my freeing the prisoners they had captured. In this way, Ochoa manipulated his junior officers including cadets at El Paraíso into signing a declaration rejecting any concessions to the guerrillas.

The document that circulated among the armed forces was tantamount to a call to rebellion. It said that, with due respect to the feelings of a father, national security should come first. "The price is too high and unjust for the freedom of one citizen." The arguments in the document were identical to some petitions that some Rightist organizations were promoting. After I had studied Ochoa's declaration, I sounded out other Army commanders to learn their thoughts. Their support reassured me, and General Vides gave me shrewd advice on how best to nullify Ochoa's insubordination.

"Let me manage this," the general said. "I would rather treat this declaration as an expression of concern, not incitement to rebel. Instead of making it a matter for discipline, I would present it to all the commanders for discussion." Vides explained that in this way we would bring all the officers to a well-understood consensus. Ochoa's ploy would be openly rejected by his colleagues.

Over the weekend, Vides consulted the officers individually. On Monday, he presented the matter to the assembled commanders. He pointed out that the guerrillas' hope for a revolution in El Salvador had been diminishing ever since the armed forces united with the elected democratic government. The guerrilla demands in the kidnapping were intended to cause dissension, to split the officers from the President. If the Army limited the President's power to negotiate or withdrew its confidence from me, then the FMLN would have its greatest victory.

"What was the value of a few prisoners compared to the power to undermine the democratic government?" he asked. That, not the release of the prisoners, was the guerrillas'

ultimate objective. As the general finished his argument, Ochoa began to look as if he were a dupe of the guerrillas.

After eight hours of discussion, the matter was put to a vote. Did the armed forces have confidence in the President's ability to conduct these negotiations in the best interest of the country? The officers voted in my favor. Seeing the overwhelming support of the officer corps, Ochoa raised his hand to make the vote unanimous.

Within three months, Ochoa's continued political posturing would exhaust the patience of the High Command. He was ordered off to a diplomatic post.

Vides' intuition about the armed forces' reaction had been correct again. As happened in the past, his leadership was able to keep the armed forces united. Instead of creating resentment, his handling of the Ochoa challenge brought the officers together on the issue.

### ***Army Unity Surprised the FMLN***

**Miguel Castellanos**—When the Minister of Defense, General Vides Casanova, frustrated the desires of the reactionaries stating, "This is not a game; we are providing the bodies," the FMLN was very much surprised to see the unification of the High Command and the support they gave to the democratic process and the Duarte Government. The other matter was that within the Armed Forces there were no serious differences between the members of the High Command. There are variations with respect to the dialogue ... Blandón [General, Chief of Staff] who gave more support, then López Nuila [Colonel, Vice-Minister of Public Security] and ... in the end ... General Vides Casanova. This was very different to the conception that Bustillo [General, Chief of Armed Forces],

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987. As quoted in *Conversaciones con el Comandante Miguel Castellanos*, edited by Javier Rojas P. (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), pp. 135-36. Copyright 1986 by Editorial Andante. Reprinted by permission of Editorial Andante.



Ochoa and other militaries had with respect to the dialogue. But there were not serious differences as they used to be, and they could not achieve the influence or enough power to bring about a coup d'etat. The support that came from the U.S. was decisive in bringing the right wing attacks to a halt; although there were rumors that some U.S. senators had told D'Aubuisson to continue the attacks because they, as Pinochet in Chile, were willing to recognize those whose intentions were to destroy Marxism.

### ***The Basic Understandings***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—I can only tell you that the Salvadoran Army in 1982 was a mirror image of the United States Army. We created an army based on the various security assistance programs. It was our mirror image, reinforced by Salvador's conventional war experience with the Hondurans. They had no reason, as they saw it, to think otherwise. The last war they fought was the one they won, and the tactics that won for them were the conventional tactics against a conventional enemy. The difficulties they were having in dealing with the insurgency were no different from those that any other conventional force—designed, organized, equipped, and trained to fight another conventional force—would have in a similar situation. It came as no surprise. It was with great difficulty that we got the Army turned around.

First, we looked at the officer corps and the tanda system, which produced 30 officers a year in peacetime environment. We were expanding the Army from 10 or 12 thousand to 40 thousand. We needed more leaders, and we needed smarter leaders and ones who weren't preoccupied with dress formations and doing squat jumps. We were interested in producing enough officers so that every key job on a battalion had one officer in that job, and he wasn't dual, triple, or quadruple hatted, as was the case in peacetime Salvadoran Army. So, we had to produce

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

a large number of officers. We did it at Fort Benning, Georgia. We produced small unit leaders who were sensitized as best as we could within the time constraints. You don't abuse your own soldiers, and you don't abuse the *campesinos*. We attacked the small unit problem by training a pilot program with the LRRPs [Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol], who could prove that a small group of guys could go out and achieve spectacular results and come back and tell about it. When I asked the Salvadorans in '82, "How come you don't use small unit operations?" They say, "Well, we send companies out; they don't find anything; we send platoons out; they don't come back." And so we proved that six guys could go out and, with the proper training and equipment, could track guerrillas and really make it very uncomfortable for them—put artillery on them, put air strikes on them, and they'd never know where it was coming from.

Once we proved that, everybody wanted to buy into the LRRPs program. Everybody wanted their own LRRPs. By extension, the next step is to train your brigade force to operate the same way, give them the same kind of training, give them the same kind of equipment and, most importantly, have a reaction force capable of bailing them out if they get in a bad situation. So, we attacked the officer corps. We attacked the training and the doctrine, if you will, how they fought this kind of war. We talked about—we didn't have to talk about human rights per se—but we talked about how you treat people and why it's important to get good intelligence from the *campesinos*. And that the best kind of intelligence is the kind they volunteer. I talked to infantry platoon leaders, and I didn't talk to them about human rights. I talked to them about how does a *campesino* in the village deal with you when your patrol goes through his village? Does he tell you, don't go down that trail because there are some bad guys down there, or does he hide his daughters and his chickens? That's human rights, and that's the perception of the population on what the military stands for. Are they part of the problem, or are they part of the solution?

If a Salvadoran or any other Central American would come to a U.S. Army school in the decade preceding the blow-up in

El Salvador, what he was getting was essentially the conventional view. There was very little counterinsurgency taught at the War College, at the staff colleges, at the Infantry School. By the late seventies it was a nonsubject. You know, I was at Leavenworth (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College) when we cut the 40 hours we had down to 8 hours. And that was in 1979. A critical year in which our opposition figured out how to fight the war and how to win it after 20 years of disasters. And at this time—at the very time when our opposition had finally got its act together—we're doing away with the subject almost completely. So, it's no wonder that the Salvadorans reflected that. What little connection they were getting, what little exposure they were getting from their Brother to the North, was essentially one of the conventional war fought with conventional means. We have got to maintain a cadre of people conversant in how to fight small. We have got to continue to be able to do as we say, and not as we do.

I don't expect the United States to ever get involved again directly, the same way we got involved in Vietnam. I do expect the United States to be able to intelligently advise its allies who are involved in that kind of war. If we don't do that, we do our allies a great disservice. They will continue right up until the point where the enemy's grappling hooks are coming over the wall, to fight the wrong kind of war—unless we steer them in the right direction. Now, that doesn't mean we're going to have our whole United States Army geared to fight the least dangerous. We do have to have an element in the United States Army prepared to advise and assist to fight the most likely. And that's the basic problem. Sometimes we get so wrapped up with a war in Europe, in a conventional war, that we lose sight of the fact that our allies are never going to face—the Salvadorans are never going to face—the Russians in the Fulda Gap.

You have to remember that what they're up against now is essentially not a mirror image of an insurgent army but a mirror image of perceived social, political, and economic inequality. A whole different ball game.

Another problem in El Salvador is that the government was unable to mobilize. There was business as usual in the city. You

know, with the exception of maybe the lights going out periodically when the guerrillas had knocked down a power line or a bomb would go off once in a while in the downtown area, by and large the city was not on a war footing. The clubs, the sidewalk cafes in the Zona Rosa, were going full blast. The discos were jumping. There was gasoline. The war was being fought by the military out in the bush, and it didn't affect the city very much. And I think the government did not do a very good job of mobilizing the population. They never declared a state of emergency. With the exception of a curfew in the city—that was a sometime thing—you really didn't know there was a war on. So I don't think that the government did a very good job of selling the population on the fact that there was a war. It didn't mobilize the population to the effort necessary to cope with it. It was easy when we had an outside invader, but it is a whole different ball game when the insurgents are 98 percent Salvadoran.

### ***We Must Understand That This War Is Fought on Diverse Fronts***

***Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila***—We must realize that this type of insurrection must be fought on diverse fronts. Our biggest mistake as military men is to assume that there is a quick and rapid solution to this war and that all we need to do is change a few tactics here and there. But this is simply not the case. This type war is so new and it's so politically inclined that its entire framework is very different. We must take political actions in order to consolidate a political front among the people. We have been able to accomplish this by focusing on democratic values and human rights.

In dealing with the economic aspects of this war our goal is to provide the people with the essential fundamental ingredients

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

to survive. When you can control the stomachs, the hearts and minds will follow. With respect to the diplomatic aspects of the war, in order to maintain the support of the entire world, it is fundamental that we manifest our activities in this country to be legitimate and our enemy's activities as illegitimate. Not to say that we are performing superbly. We still have a long way to go for that, but it hasn't been because of any lack of will or knowledge on our part.

There is a definite need for propaganda techniques, internally and externally. People must know what is really going on, not only with respect to the activities of the government and armed forces, but also what the enemy's real intentions and motivations are. That is fundamental. Of course when I speak of propaganda I'm referring to the psychological aspects of it. It is fundamental to influence an individual psychologically. Thus, a psychological war. First, it is necessary to implant doubts in people's minds and then implant certain principles and concepts in them.

We've talked about the political and economic war. When making reference to a social war we must consider first that, regardless of the existence of moderately rich towns, there are always some sections that are traditionally marginal. This situation usually occurs in Third World countries where there are cases of extreme poverty. This is the situation in El Salvador. Unfortunately, in the past the more powerful economic sections of this country did not recognize it and were only conscious about benefiting personally. They never considered sharing their wealth with those who needed it the most. We must definitely focus on the social aspects of this war. The state must take responsibility for offering a good education, and public schools should be as good as private schools. They should also concentrate on providing good medical attention, and again, public hospitals should be as good as private ones. In order to keep people happy, there must be good communication services as well as public services and transportation services. In sum, the people should be provided with ideal living conditions.

We, the military, are doing the best we can to provide all of these services. Certainly we are the ones at the front and

risking our lives, but we could not manage without the other factors of this war I've already mentioned. If we didn't have a political project we would have lost the war. If we didn't have at this moment an economic project to help and improve the living conditions of the needy, we could lose this war. If we had maintained ourselves in a state of isolationism and not reestablished international relations with other nations, with international organizations and private organizations, we would be in a very difficult situation. If we had not alerted our people about the current situation in Nicaragua—the fact that there is a Marxist political project in that country and El Salvador is returning to a stable democratic country—we would also be in trouble. Then, we've had to emphasize on our people that there are two types of revolutions: a Marxist revolution and a democratic revolution. Let's wait and see which wins. Our countries are both the same. The Nicaraguans are the same as the Salvadorans. We eat the same, drink the same, think the same way, speak the same way. Then we have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that where there's a will, there's a way, and where there is a true conviction to winning we can reestablish true democracies. All of these factors are equally as important.

We as soldiers always think that military actions are most important and that 90 percent of the effort should be ours. Well, that's wrong. The effort must be equal. If you take 100 and divide it by 6, the result is the total military effort that must be made. The less military effort is made, the less casualties, destruction, violence, and danger there is. That is fundamental.

### ***Toward a Permanent Offensive***

***General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova***—Our major concern was to have a capable armed forces in order to confront the subversives, who were in much greater numbers than we

General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987.

had anticipated. We needed to acquire vehicles and helicopters, to improve our infantry's equipment which included 13- to 14-year-old guns. We needed to improve the armed forces' professionalism, our units, improve coordination capabilities, provide some security to our military installations, which were not designed for an external or internal threat but, rather, as housing facilities. We needed to improve our intelligence systems. Accomplishing these tasks with resources is easy, but lacking the necessary means to do so makes it very difficult. Thank God we've been able to count on the support and aid from the United States. It has allowed us to progress substantially during the first 6 years, quite different from what we had accomplished in the previous 25 years. For example, back then we had the capability of transporting only 20 people in helicopters. They were all very small helicopters and commercial ones at that. I think today, if all the helicopters were in good shape, we could transport some 500 people, simultaneously. This is indicative of a significant evolution, at least 20 to 25 times greater than the original capabilities we had then. We also lacked the necessary airplanes to combat the subversives. To date we have very few planes but are managing to successfully defeat the insurgents. We also lacked sufficient combat medics. Today, there are a little more than 2,000 professionally trained nurses to rescue combat victims. We didn't have helicopters to rescue the wounded from battlegrounds. Today we own five. We have established the paramedics personnel and improved our health services—military health facilities. Our transportation vehicles were extremely inefficient at one time, but now we have improved mobilization capability. During the final offensive we were able to defeat the enemy with 40 radios that had arrived eight days before. I don't think the ESAF had more than 250 radios (PRC-77's) at the time. Now we can communicate from 2,000 to 3,000 radios, and all of our units have their own radio equipment. This has improved our communications capabilities and our capacity to deliver instructions and coordinate actions of our troops. Our combat equipment has increased tremendously—artillery, infantry weapons—there's more

support for aerial equipment, etc. We have improved professionally and with respect to the employment of weapons. We have converted an armed forces prepared to fight a conventional war into one that combats subversion. All of our units are trained. The public security forces have been professionalized, which is largely due to the efforts of Colonel López Nuila. We are in the process of creating special schools at various levels in order to have truly professional security forces. We have improved our investigation techniques and have trained our units for a psychological war. This has enabled us to defeat the enemy more effectively. Thanks to the support and efforts of the United States, we've managed to legitimize our military forces.

I don't think many countries benefit from the means of support and analytical capabilities that we have managed to acquire. We have our own radio system that supports the armed forces. We have respected the democratic process and human rights, and we have improved our armed forces, not only growing in numbers, but also growing professionally and in moral virtues. In five and a half years our Army has increased from 15,000 to 50,000. This growth also includes the availability of communications, materials—weapons, vehicles, ammunition—administrative and management capabilities, uniforms, boots, underwear, etc. I believe that with the aid we've received from the United States we have a professional armed forces that is undoubtedly qualified to confront the subversive forces in the future. I reemphasize this issue because I merely want to point out the improvements we have had since 1981-1983, when the armed forces had a defensive position due to the limited resources we had. Presently we hold a strong offensive position.

Our position must be offensive. Back in '83, I remember attending a meeting in the United States where government officials were worried that El Salvador was going to fall within 15 days. I reassured them that this was not the case, and we were going to fight until the end, if necessary, but we needed aid. I also reassured them that we were progressing in the democratic process and the human rights issue and that we were winning the war. Thanks to the U.S. aid, the Salvadoran



people's cooperation and their support for the armed forces, we were able to overcome those problems. Back then we faced problems in organization, problems in unity of command, a sharp division among the armed forces, serious political problems. People were demonstrating in the streets. The subversives were striking heavy blows everywhere. Democratic countries were pressuring us, as well as the U.S. Congress. Those countries wanted El Salvador to experience the same radical changes as did Nicaragua. There was a certain insurgent enthusiasm at the time when it was contemplated that there might be five more Nicaraguas in Central America.

This coming December it will be three years since we adopted a permanent offensive position throughout the entire national territory. I received a lot of support from the officers and troops. We've faced difficulties at times when having to depend on our national budget, but we've managed to come through. We have received aid from the United States according to how it was planned under the Kissinger or Jackson program. I'm not quite sure what it was called, but regardless of that it enabled us to develop a strategy for five years.

I was quite satisfied with the outcome of my last visit to Washington. Up to now, all of the promises that were made then have been fulfilled. That has been very important to me because when I travelled to Washington I was asked, "General, are you going to respect the democratic process?" My response was, "Give me some time and I will prove to you that you can depend on us and that we won't go back on our word. Give us an opportunity, and we will do it." Presently, the United States recognizes that we have fulfilled our promises, and as a result we are receiving a much more general support, not only from the government, but also from the Senate and [the House], which are constantly in disagreement with one another; however, there has been more of a unanimous support with respect to the problem in El Salvador.

I would like you to know, before we continue any further with this interview, that the way I express myself throughout is mostly my point of view. When I was learning how to read my father used to tell me not to believe everything you read.

Rather, learn to formulate your own criteria. When you listen to people speak, talk to those who have been actively involved in the process so that your perception of things is more clear to you and you can depend on your own interpretations rather than someone else's. Sometimes people's interpretations of things tend to be more opinionated than others. Nevertheless, I think mine will help you in the long run.

When we took the offensive in '83, it boosted the armed forces' morale significantly. It also enabled us to keep the subversive forces on the run and decentralize their units. They formed smaller groups because they knew we had the capability to surround them and to destroy them. However, by forming these smaller groups the subversives lost the support of the people and the capacity to indoctrinate them. They became wearied and fatigued and faced a lot of difficulties when trying to receive supplies and trying to transport them from one location to another. This situation exhausted them physically and morally. Due to these several factors and the psychological operations campaign we launched, we were able to sustain our offensive position and continue to strengthen our forces.

People started giving in to the armed forces. The armed forces' humanitarian approach to this war continued during that time, and those same people who have previously given in to the humanitarian approach to this war continued during that time. Those same people who had previously given in to the humane tactics of our forces would one day try to convince someone else that we are sympathetic toward the people. That we are not a ruthless and brutal entity who kills people for the pleasure of doing so. Instead, we would encourage people by giving them a certain amount of money for every rifle they'd come across, and if they stumbled on two or more, the price would double. We used these people as personal messengers to spread around our intentions, and coincidentally there was massive desertion from the subversive forces. I believe they reached some 900 or so desertions, unlike years past where there were none.

As soon as the desertions from the subversives became evident, we noticed a decrease in the capabilities of the

subversives to fulfill certain actions or even lacking the ability to control one of the 14 departments. They then resorted to those tactics they had practiced years before when they were ambushing small locations, destroying electric posts, destroying small bridges, machine-gunning bus stops because people continued to work and support the government rather than acknowledging the efforts of the subversives. During this time, our forces began to combat in small units.

We began to use intelligence sources more effectively, lessen our consumption of ammunition, our use of vehicles, etc. But we still had to insert two or three battalions into certain areas as part of our offensive position, due to a strong resistance on the part of the subversives. Beginning in January of this year [1986], we entered these areas with very small units, but there is a national-level response to this offensive approach we have taken. There is an increased awareness of the capabilities and initiative taken by the armed forces, and the positive results the military has had have become quite evident throughout the national territory. Unit discipline and morale have become strengthened characteristics of the armed forces. We have learned to do with what we have.

A new system was introduced January of this year. We have demonstrated to the insurgents that their impenetrable sanctuaries can be taken and occupied for a considerable length of time. For example, one of our battalions occupied the territory of Guazapa for 12 months, in which their (insurgents') control centers, logistics, and supplies were located. This has been accomplished with four or five other insurgent installations throughout the country. Such operations include the Chávez Carreño operation in north Chalatenango, the Jersón Calite Operations in Usulután, the Hero Operation in Morazán (back on October 23), and other operations we've carried out to protect harvest, the elections, transportation, etc.

When I talk to North Americans I tend to compare the armed forces to the stages of evolution of learning to play soccer. During the first stage you can score points in the games by kicking, fouling, and disregarding the rules of the game. That was our first evolutionary stage. We didn't have any shoes

and fought barefoot, but in the end we won. However, during that time we realized that we needed to improve our standards if we wanted to win and save this country. A boy knows he has to work if he wants to wear soccer shoes. He has to receive proper training in order to learn the different stages of the game. He needs to purchase the proper trunks so he can look presentable. He must watch television and observe the different plays he must learn. You can already see the formation of the individual player, a small team.

During those first three years the team begins to improve its image—abides by the rules of the game, respects the referee, knows where to strike, knows how long to play. Of course, in a strictly military sense, you see the individual soldier who wants to develop a constant pace within the different units, among the different elements, and he respects what the referee may have to say with respect to human rights. He also is conscious of the public's perception of how he is performing and tries to outdo himself in order to receive applause and congratulations. I must admit that we have yet to master this aspect of our armed forces' degree of improvement; we are a little slow at this. The game begins. We reach the goalie's line, but we are not able to score as many points as we'd like. As a result, a General Staff was created in order to better coordinate the air, land, and sea operations. You then see an improvement in communications and overall attitudes. There is hope for a team improvement, but we need a Pelé and a Maradona. We need a lot of people who will have the initiative to fight in the fields and attack by surprise. This is more or less how we've been playing this game, and by the beginning of January of this year the armed forces' analyses, strategic planning in the *cuarteles*, are fixed. There is no more looking back on what happened, what could have been done. Rather we focus on the improvements to make for the future. What can we do for these people? What means do we have to accomplish our goals? That is, the accomplishment of those tasks heavily depends on how much respect the referee receives.

We are conscious of the fact that in order to win this battle we must follow the rules of the game because one foul play can

mean a goal. We then begin to see a team that better coordinates its plays, and more intelligently. There is no need to exert as much effort as before because we now have an improved, coordinated plan to deal with the situation. The public sees the winning team as a legitimate one. We don't need to play dirty in order to win.

Another evolutionary stage of the armed forces that I've seen so far is the consolidation of the democratic values—respect for human rights, a much higher degree of professionalism where a member of the armed forces acknowledges the fact that he is susceptible to the same treatment as any other citizen is under the law. This is quite an evolution in our forces, a more conscious awareness that there is the possibility to excel in the future. But, unfortunately, things were too good to be true. The earthquake introduced a drastic change to what we were doing.

Regardless of the earthquake, the armed forces have managed to fulfill most of their obligations. We have only experienced two robbery cases in San Salvador since then. The people are hungry and jobless, but, nevertheless, we've managed to successfully accomplish our mission, and this is due mainly to the support we've received from the people. We've been able to maintain security all along the national territory despite the problems the country faces. But, we are aware of the fact that the less affected area, in terms of the war, is San Salvador. But due to the effects of the earthquake, the capital looks like it's been under constant subversion five or six months.

Finally, we can say with a lot of pride that our soldiers are heroes of this country. Industrialists, agriculturalists, cattlemen, professionals, doctors, lawyers, professors have also been heroes, as well as the people who work daily at the market place by selling their products and enabling our *campesinos* in difficult areas to continue to produce out in the fields. I think this is the first major bulwark the Communist front has encountered because it proves what kind of governmental system the people want to live under and be subject to. It has demonstrated its capabilities to undergo much pain and suffering in order to obtain what it really wants. The people have defied

the subversives' activities by impeding the latter's use of transportation facilities. We have a very strong and courageous people who, within the means available to them, have managed to put up a fight against the enemy and cooperate in our efforts to defend this country.

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—Then, of course, our recent successes are due to the product of time, the product of a lot of effort, and the product of our highly trained officers who have learned to combat. Our soldiers became more skillful, and we could count on better equipment, much more knowledge, and a more effective aerial support. All of these circumstances have made it possible for us to change the course of the war—a war that we were desperately losing back in 1983.

### ***The Professionalization of the Salvadoran Military***

**Colonel James J. Steele**—When I say professionalize or assist them in professionalization, that's not an easy task to define or to accomplish if you look at the history of this military and its involvement in politics. When we say professionalize, I'm talking about developing, within the military, the respect for the human rights of its citizens, to help protect the democratic process, and so on. I think, as you look at those, there's been some pretty significant progress. If you look at this military and say, "Okay, have we really changed their attitude towards democracy, their role in the society, or have we just levered them into a behavioral change?" The answer is, at this point, it's too early to tell. It's going to take a while, whether you're talking about the attitude of the military or the prospects for

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5–10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

democracy in El Salvador. It's going to take a couple of presidential elections before you begin to really institutionalize that process. If you look at the attitudes of not just senior officers but also junior officers, you see a change in terms of how they see the people and how they see their role in the society. If you look at, and you're trying to judge, how you're doing on professionalizing the military, look at the way it's performed in the last elections, say, presidential elections in '84 or the assembly elections in '85.

The other thing is that they have accepted our advice and we have accepted their views. There was a mutual understanding and agreement on not just training but the whole spectrum of the program including how many people would be sent for training, what kind of equipment was going to be brought in, how the course was going to be developed and structured to deal with the threat.



## *Changes in Organization, Training, and Operations*

### *Evolving Organization, Training, and Operations in the Army*

**Colonel René Emilio Ponce**—As Chief of Operations of the Combined General Staff of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, I will focus on three aspects of the Army's evolution that are my responsibility—organization, training, and operations. At the outset of this conflict, between 1978-79, the armed forces had battalions organized in the classical sense. That is, they were prepared to fight a conventional war. We began to realize that this type of organization was unsuitable for confronting the internal problem at the time. As a result drastic changes were made in organizing these units, and we initiated hunter battalions made up of 220 men. That was in '80-'82. As the war intensified, we realized that these new battalions were much too small to encounter the organized units the subversives had back then. In 1981-82 then we created rapid reaction battalions with a total of 1,200 men. Presently, we have five of these rapid reaction battalions. As the hunter battalions slowly began to disappear within the different brigades and military

Colonel René Emilio Ponce, former C-3 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and now Commander of the Third Brigade, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.



detachments, we formed anti-terrorist infantry battalions composed of approximately 580 troops and countersubversion infantry battalions composed of 390 troops. The location of these battalions, whether anti-terrorist or countersubversion, is in agreement with the conflict situation in the area. For example, in the eastern sections, where most of the hostility prevails, we have anti-terrorist infantry battalions in the brigade and military detachments. There is much less hostility in the western region of the country. We have positioned several countersubversion battalions in this region because we believe it is the most effective way to counteract the terrorist activities in the region. Also, back in '82, we intensified training and the organization of reconnaissance units and snipers in order to provide more impulse to the military intelligence system we had then. Additionally, some modifications had to be made with regard to the territorial military division in the country.

We needed to have a territorial division that was in accordance with the situation at the time and with the terrestrial communication routes that existed back then, also because of the economic importance of the areas. Therefore, we have to establish military zones such as the Usulután Department. Due to the territorial military division in this department there has been an attempt to coincide with political division in our country. We have managed to secure a tighter command and control at the various levels of military hierarchy, since 1984. I'm referring to colonels all the way down to corporals. Our Air Force has also experienced an improvement with respect to its troops. Due to its incrementation, it has reorganized completely. The Navy had done the same; however, they depend on less troops.

With respect to training, when we began to confront this type of internal conflict, we were only prepared to deal with a conventional war, a classical war. We had no idea what it was like to fight a guerrilla war, a low-intensity conflict as it is referred to by the Americans. But the development of this type of war required us to accomplish certain training techniques at all levels—chiefs, officers, cadets, Army/Air Force/Marine troops—and prepare them ideologically, physically, technically,

and tactically to confront a subversive war, not only with regard to the military field, but also the social, political, economic, and psychological fields. But more importantly, that it is an external threat. Working within this conceptual framework we needed to prepare our forces to deal with the situation at hand by inculcating into them the role they had to perform throughout this type of conflict.

By that time we needed to modify the required military service. At the beginning, only one year was required. We then increased the time to 18 months, and presently the men are required to serve 24 months. But due to the continuation of this war, conflict, struggle, whatever you want to call it, we thought it would be necessary to seek the assistance of highly specialized, technically competent individuals in order to win this war. Instead, we decided to reorganize our budget so that by the end of the required 24-month period of service, the soldier could choose to remain for a longer period of time and increase his salary. This measure contributed significantly to improving our forces and incrementing our troops. Additionally, our government's image improved in the eyes of the international world, along with the armed forces.

We began receiving offers from different countries to send our officers, cadets, and troops to foreign schools to receive proper education and training. I could point out that our only source of training support was the United States, but by that time, we began receiving scholarships from Belgium, England, Italy, Spain, Germany, and most of the South American countries, with the exception of Ecuador and Bolivia. To this date, our officers, cadets, and troops are studying in foreign schools and taking courses in technical specialization and professionalization, at the different levels. In 1984, the Centro de Entrenamiento Militar de la Fuerza Armada, CEMFA (Armed Forces Military Training Center), was established in La Unión. This resulted from a need to provide a better organized training system and to free those units which were subject to constant hostile enemy fire.

Since 1984, then, we have been training more capable soldiers in a more organized manner. The outcome is very

positive. Our training periods were reduced from a 15-week course to 12 weeks. As a result, there has been improvement in combat efficiency, better treatment of the civilian population on the part of the military, substantial progress with regard to the human rights issue, and a successful attempt to minimize abuses of authority. Each unit, respectively, has indoctrinated its troops in all aspects ranging from promotions to technical training and taught them to use a specific weapon and perform in special units—reconnaissance units, *francotiradores* [snipers], etc.

The one commonality that is shared by all of these factors is that they are all the product of foreign assistance and, as a result, have provided a major professionalization of this institution. I'm referring to the highest ranking general all the way down to the corporal level. It has resulted in improved relations with the civilian population, a betterment of combat efficiency and analysis capabilities, especially at the higher echelons of the military. Training has tremendously influenced the members of this institution. The professionalism, training, and military education we've had since 1983 has permitted the armed forces to remain a united, more dedicated institution and retain a military advantage in the struggle against the subversives.

In 1984, with the restructuring of the commands, including the high-ranking military commands, we saw a new stage in the armed forces. Beginning with 1984, we created the Joint Operations Center of the Armed Forces in order to deal with the situation at a national level. The Tactical Operations Centers were created in each brigade to improve command and control. Commandants were replaced in order to better the conduct of military operations out in the fields. We took the offensive at a national level and since then we've been able to maintain the initiative. We've obtained greater combat efficiency and great operability of our units due to the following factors: (1) better command and control and (2) greater dispersion of our troops throughout the terrain. But the introduction of psychological operations and the civic action activities, to improve our image in the eyes of our people and to obtain their support and

sympathy, will help us win this war. It is also due to the introduction of heli-transport systems, whether with specialized units at the strategic level or by the employment of heli-transport operations or specialized units at the brigade and military detachment levels. There has been an increase of small unit operations as well as ambushes. This represents rather significant progress because, previously, we operated at great levels and with large centralized units. Since 1984-85 we've been operating with smaller units.

A third factor is our increased support in air power support and artillery. I want to emphasize the fact that the Air Force has evolved dramatically in its tactical procedures, in its vast support to units on land, and has been very significant throughout this struggle. Of course, this is also due to the increased training capability and aerial equipment along with the courage displayed by the pilots. Artillery has proved to be efficient at all times.

Another factor involved the greater tactical mobility and communications systems, which have been tremendously upgraded. This is a result of the greater acquisition of equipment such as trucks, pick-ups, jeeps, and adequate communications equipment which better enable us to operate our small units.

With much more limited resources, the Navy has also been able to improve on some of its deficiencies. It has incremented its naval resources and has created new units such as Marine Infantry Battalion and the Marine Commando Battalion.

An additional factor that has contributed to the upgrading of our military operations is the further development of our military intelligence system; little by little we've improved on that. But, unfortunately, we're not out of the woods yet. We need to increase our capabilities in this field.

One more factor I would like to point out is that due to the consistent support we've received from the U.S. Government, our combat service support has improved. It has enabled us to alter our logistics programs into a more practical system, as a result, the Logistics Support Command.

## ***Another View of Organization and Training***

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—I'll start out and talk about the organization of the Salvadoran military from the top. First you have a Minister of Defense, who is a general officer and a career military person. The Minister of Defense is General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova. He supports the President very closely, has close rapport with the President, and he has expended a lot of political capital in supporting President Duarte. He has two Vice Ministers of Defense, a Vice Minister of Defense for Military Matters, another general officer, General Rafael Flores Lima, and a Vice Minister of Defense for Public Security, Colonel López Nuila.

Subordinate to the Ministry of Defense, you have the Joint General Staff. The Chief of the Joint General Staff is General Onecífero Blandón. He has subordinate to him a C-1 section responsible for personnel, a C-2 section responsible for intelligence, a C-3 section responsible for operations, a C-4 section responsible for logistics, and a C-5 section responsible for psychological operations and civil affairs. The formerly separate signal section on the Joint General Staff has been subordinated to the C-3 section—operations.

The country is divided into six military zones. Each military zone is commanded by a full colonel. The slot, the job, calls for a general officer, but they have promoted no one in those positions to the grade of general, so the military zones are commanded by colonels.

The six military zones are also territorial commands with geographical limits. The person who is a military zone commander is also a brigade commander. The commander of the 6th Military Zone, for instance, is also the commander of the 6th Brigade. Each of these military zones normally has within it three departments which are the political subdivisions of the nation. In one particular case the 4th Military Zone

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

consists only of one department. This department is divided into two military command areas. The zonal command is exercised from El Paraíso. A subordinate *destacamento* or detachment has its command center in the city of Chalatenango, the capital of the Department of Chalatenango. And the 6th Military Zone also consists of only one department. But, those are exceptions to the rule.

Each departmental command normally has a lieutenant colonel commanding at the departmental level, and that is a detachment level command or a *destacamento*. These commanders are then, in theory at least, subordinate to the military zone commander. Your military zone or brigade commander is located normally, with one exception, in a departmental headquarters or in a departmental capital. In such a case, he is at one and the same time both a military zone commander and the commander of the forces which operate in that particular department. Normally, in a given department, there are two or three infantry battalions of differing sizes, depending upon the threat, which are directly responsive and subordinate to the departmental commander.

Where the military zone is located in a departmental headquarters, the brigade commander has directly under his control three infantry battalions plus the *destacamento* or the detachment commanders of the other two departments which form his military zone. So he's double-hatted. He's a military zone/brigade commander under one hat, and he's also a departmental commander of the department in which his headquarters is located.

There is a long tradition of autonomy at the departmental level. Each of the commanders in a department, although he is directly subordinate to the military zone/brigade commander, nevertheless by tradition feels that he has a great deal of independent responsibility. Slowly but surely these departmental commanders have been brought under the control of the brigade commanders. But still there's a tendency for a departmental commander, if he's not happy with an order he received, to short circuit the chain of command and go directly back to the Joint General Staff for clarification of his instructions. This

problem is being largely solved, and pretty strong people have been made brigade commanders so that they're able to control the departmental commanders. But there are still problems as far as cooperation between different military zones is concerned. You may have a military zone which will have anywhere from six, seven, eight, or nine battalions within the military zone—three departments, three battalions per department. You're talking about potentially nine infantry battalions conducting an operation in one military zone which has three military departments in it. And an adjacent military zone will have another major operation going, and there's no coordination between military zones. The blocking forces aren't coordinated between military zones. So you have a breakdown of coordination, not always but frequently, of operations between military zones.

Within a military zone, within a brigade area, the departments do coordinate their operations. The military zone commander will run a military zone-wide operation and use the forces of all the departments within his military zone to conduct a larger operation, and those are fairly carefully planned and coordinated. In fact, the battalions that normally operate in one department may very well cross into another department within the same military zone as part of an operation. However, it has been noted from time-to-time that even within a military zone, the military zone/brigade commander, that colonel, will hesitate to issue a direct order to a departmental commander. There may be bickering and discussing and haggling going on over what the role of the subordinate really is for an operation. So this old tradition of autonomy within a department is still there beneath the surface, and it takes a really strong man as brigade commander to demand compliance.

The problem is that the promotion system in El Salvador is not really based on merit. It's based on time in grade and time in service and certain school gates. I think you have to graduate from Command and General Staff College to be promoted to lieutenant colonel, for instance. But that being given, they will all be promoted on the same day. Therefore you have a large pool of guys from whom your commanders can be selected.

More and more, as time has gone on, the good guys have been selected for departmental commands, for command of your immediate reaction battalions, for brigade command. You've got some pretty good people there, but the guys that aren't so good don't get thrown out of the Army or left behind in the promotion cycle. The first real selection, the narrowing down, the peaking of the pyramid, really occurs when people who don't get into the Command and General Staff College and don't make lieutenant colonel. And some of them drop out there. There's a selection process for their Command and General Staff College, but once a guy has made lieutenant colonel, he's going to make colonel right along with his classmates. The narrowing point comes for promotion to general officer. That's done by board selection and approved by the president. But, the military pretty much controls selection to the grade of general officer. Let me get back to this—while you have some good guys who are getting into those positions of command, you also have some mediocre and some poor guys at the grades of lieutenant colonel and colonel for whom a home in the service must be found somewhere. They're still out there doing a little damage here and a little damage there because you can't get rid of them. There's no procedure for booting these guys out of the service or not promoting them. They get promoted, and they've got to be assigned somewhere.

You have to understand that different areas of the country are like night and day as far as the level of conflict is concerned. There are some sleepy hollow type areas in the western part of the country where they've had some real zingers, some losers, because you could park the guy out there, and he couldn't do too much damage. The eastern three departments in the 3rd Military Zone, with its headquarters at San Miguel, always has been a very active area. Likewise, the 4th Military Zone, which is really the Department of Chalatenango, and the 6th Military Zone, which is one department—the Department of Usulután—and the 5th Military Zone headquartered at San Vicente with three departments. These are conflict areas, and among the best people they can find are chosen to head up those departments or to take those military zone commands and the departmental commands.



We just scratched on the surface of the organization. As far as the level of training is concerned, today the level of training of the soldiers—the young recruits who come in for a two-year period of service—has improved immensely. The Salvadorans now have their own national basic training center located very near La Unión, which is in the Third Military Zone in the Department of La Unión. The training now is very good, very professional. So we're getting young soldiers in the system who are good. We sent a number of officers and enlisted personnel to various places for training—Fort Bragg, Fort Benning, the Regional Military Training Center in Honduras (which is closed now and has been for some time)—and the training at the lower levels has been good. We've done a lot of training of cadets at the U.S. Army School of the Americans (USARSA), first in Panama and now at Fort Benning, Georgia. So the young leaders are getting good training.

The breakdown, the weakness, is among officers in mid-level grades which I would define as senior captains and junior majors. The guys who are coming in and getting ready to take over the command of your immediate reaction battalions or are now battalion commanders. These are guys who really are lacking in basic military training. Things you seldom see—range cards, fire plans, holes in the ground, night firing stakes, flank security (we go right down the line of the little nitty-gritty things), proper use of direct fire support, for instance. These things that mark the ability of a unit to go out and stay out in the field and live are missing—terrain analysis, terrain appreciation. You'll see a unit will set up a bivouac—using the term rather loosely—on an operation potentially in contact with the enemy in a location that is overlooked by a piece of higher ground one or two hundred meters away and be completely unaware of the fact that they could just be all shot to pieces by two or three guerrillas from that location. There's no noise or light discipline at night—fires get lit. It's like sort of a Civil War bivouac or something like that—campfires here and there, people gathered around the fires talking, and this sort of thing, with no evident organization for the defense, no reserve, no positions. There may be some listening posts out, I don't know. I'm not aware of

what steps they may have taken to tighten up this sort of thing, but from what I have seen the professional things that need to be done to fight successfully are simply not being done. This is not a breakdown in the training of the individual soldier, and it's not a breakdown in the training of the young cadets and lieutenants. The breakdown is at the mid-leadership level and the senior leadership level.

We bring guys back to the States, more senior people, send them to our Command and General Staff Course—which, by the way, isn't long enough to qualify them for their DEM (Diploma de Estado Mayor). They don't get credit for going to our Command and General Staff Course because it's too short. Very interesting.

These guys are not getting the right kind of training in the States. They come back, and they get a lot of very theoretical training, a lot of very fine training in our training programs. The courses that we should be offering to train their mid-level officers, the guys we need to reach, should be at either the basic or the advanced course level. USARSA has got a good basic course, and I believe a good advanced officer course, but even in those courses—and I spent nearly three years at USARSA—we're still not teaching the basics to the mid-level guy. We assume that an officer coming into our schooling program at the grade of captain or major has all of this stuff down pat.

We're making a lot of assumptions which are incorrect. We assume that he has certain basic leadership skills, that he's going to check on his guys, that he's going to go out himself and make sure that things are being done, when that's probably not the case. We assume that he appreciates terrain and knows how to set up a defensive position properly. How to use his fire support, how to mount a night patrol, or any other type of offensive operation. That he stays off the roads and trails and puts out flank security. We assume all of these things, and we teach at a higher level. The fact is that these officers don't operate that way. The way we're going now it will take a full military generation—which I define as about 20 years—and maybe more, before we get a trickle-up effect and we start seeing professionalism at the battalion command level. In El

Salvador the battalion command level is captain and major. Some of these guys are very, very good, but most of them are lacking in some of the basic skills. We can train the lieutenant colonels all we want, and we can train the cadets and the troops all we want, but until we reach the guys in the positions of command, the training that we give the young soldiers and the young cadets won't get employed because they immediately forget all of the good things they've learned and adapt to the bad habits of their own chain of command.

One other thing is here that is a problem in all Third World armies, and that is that the officer corps is usually not too well paid. That is the case also in El Salvador, and, as a result, you have some corruption. Suffice it to say that the system doesn't cleanse itself, that the institutional solidarity is such that officers who were known to be corrupt were not punished for their corruption, and this causes a very serious degradation of discipline throughout the structure. That corruption, while not a dominating factor in the Salvadoran military, is there. There were three to five individuals seriously involved with very lucrative, corrupt practices. Some of them were rather senior, and no steps were taken really to hold them accountable for their actions.

Other lesser forms of what I would call *traditional corruption* continue to play a role in the life support system of the Salvadoran officer. These all have the effect of detracting from discipline and detract, I believe, from the confidence that the officers have in their own soldiers. They hesitate to demand great things of them in some cases because they know that their own basis for demanding sacrifice is a little bit on the weak side. This is not as great a problem in El Salvador as it is in many other places, and the problem, I think, is recognized by many people. It's just that the institutional solidarity of the officer corps is such that it's almost impossible at the present time to do anything about it.

I might mention the chain of command. As in any very small officer corps, you have a lot of personal friendships, and you have people who are related to each other. From time to time that chain of command, unfortunately, is circumvented.

The departmental commanders have traditionally had a great deal of regional autonomy which they have jealously guarded. They have a tendency, therefore, to bypass the chain of command which passes through the brigade and go directly back to the Joint General Staff. An officer might very well appeal directly to the Chief of the Joint General Staff or to the Minister of Defense if he were a personal friend, and he didn't like an order that he had received from his immediate superior. There's a very strong possibility that the order would be changed or that he would be given to understand that he didn't have to worry about doing it. This occurred, I know, on at least one specific occasion when the Chief of the Joint General Staff ordered an officer in the 2nd Military Zone to reorganize his battalions according to a new Table of Organization and Equipment. He didn't want to do it. He was a cousin of the Minister of Defense, called the Minister of Defense, and that ended the matter right there.

Another factor acting in the chain of command is the hesitancy to do anything that's confrontational. If you issue an order to someone and it's a tough damn order, unless you're willing to confront an individual and force him to do it, there is a tendency not to follow through if you think there's some likelihood that your order hasn't been executed, because it's very embarrassing when you discover the guy isn't doing what you've told him to do. This is not prevalent, but still the chain of command doesn't work the same way (as ours). There is not that obligation on the part of the senior officer to follow through and make sure that his order has been executed according to its intent. The sense of urgency and obligation to do that does not exist. It's not there.

## ***No Place in the Country the Army Can't Go***

**Colonel John Ellerson**—I talked about the fact that early-on the biggest thing that guys here did was to take the ESAF from

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

12-14,000 to 56,000 reasonably well equipped and trained guys. They now have a lot more to work with than they did. They got an Air Force that is an insurance policy. The ESAF can't win with it, but they can't lose with it either. So we took them from the stage where they were fighting six inches out in front of themselves, worrying about whether they were going to survive from today until tomorrow, to where they are going to survive tomorrow. But now they are trying to figure out, how do I win, and how do I finish this thing off? How do I refine it?

As I would describe the situation now, we are fighting at about two different levels. We do have these larger units, these 56,000 guys out and about beating the bushes, broken out into smaller units operating increasingly at night, not terribly sophisticated, not terribly polished yet, just 56,000 of our guys out against 5,000 or 6,000 of theirs. They are saying, "I may be stumble, bumble. I may be route step, but damn it, I'm out there now, and I'm out there in smaller units. I'm out there at night. I'm out there just throwing things up in the air, confusing the issue, making it hard if not impossible for a guerrilla to stay any place for more than a day or so." The people that we capture tell us that 24-36 hours tops, and they've got to be moving. Increasingly in the core areas of the country it's the terrorists that you kill. Their equipment is not in that good shape. Their uniform is not that good. He doesn't look like he has been living a very good life.

So again, the picture I want to create is there are 56,000 out and about and going anywhere they want. There is no place in this country now that the ESAF doesn't go, can't go, in those smaller operating units. Just throwing things up in the air, keeping the guerrilla off balance, making life generally miserable for him. They kill 2 or 3 of the ESAF this week, we kill 8 to 10 of them. They kill 5 to 8 of the ESAF this week, we kill 18 to 20 of them this week. That's about the way it seems to go. Once in a while, we go to sleep at the switch, like in El Paraíso, and we get our nose bloodied, but by and large as we go along, they kill 10 of us, we kill 20 of them. They kill 2 or 3, we kill 10. And we can replace our 2 or 3 a lot easier than he can replace his 10. There is ample evidence of that. Increased forced recruiting on their part. Desertions that we know of are down because their numbers over-

all are down. At that one level we are playing again with these larger units just out and about, going anywhere, everywhere. More often than not, just throwing things up in the air, taking the initiative away from the guerrilla, making life generally uncomfortable for them.

Beyond that, starting during Jim Steele's time the ESAF began to try to develop at each brigade a special operating force, a takeoff on the prowls, out at the air base. They all had different names. They called them prowls; they called them "goeys"; they called them "proeys"—but it's a 20- or 30-man, special, super duper outfit, you pull off line. You give them one or two weeks of training and a patch of their own. A different patch, with a lot of colors; that is important. You slap them on the rear-end and tell them they are important and they are different and mean and, son of a gun, they believe you. Then you kind of hold them back for that harder target where you do have some good intel, and you need to be able to react against it. You send these guys out against it, and they are having a good effect but not surprisingly so. They are a little bit better trained, but more importantly they enter the battle fresh. They are equipped fine, but they enter the battle fresh and in response to pretty good intel, so they go in to this thing anticipating combat. Which means they are wrapped a little bit tighter. They aren't carrying their weapon by the muzzle, over their shoulder. They go in looking for a fight with the initiative because they've got a little intel, and it's, by and large, those guys who are being very successful. In the units they are accounting for an increasingly high percentage of the casualties we inflict on the guerrillas, and they take remarkably few casualties themselves.

The picture I want to give you then is that we are playing now on two levels. The large units just out and about, guarding bridges, guarding posts, moving about, confusing things, keeping the guerrilla off balance. And then the smaller units that each of the brigades and DMs (military districts) hold a little bit more in reserve, who are more precisely targeted against harder intel, hopefully against the leadership. They go in on these strike operations with pretty good effectiveness and inflict casualties, hit the guerrillas hard, take very few casualties themselves. They are accounting for, in the time I've been here, a fair number of the

cadre leadership. People who have names on the guerrilla side. That is important. In 4th Brigade, I was talking to Gus Taylor (probably six months ago now), but the way he described this process was he went out and he waited and watched for a couple of weeks until he identified this crusty NCO who had a reputation for being mean and looked like it. Gus went over and grabbed him and said, "Would you like to be in a kind of a special outfit that goes out and kicks tail?" and the guy said, "Airborne"; then he said, "Well, who are the two badest asses in this brigade?" This guy points out these two fellows, and so Gus brings them over and puts the same question to them. And yes, they are all for that, and he asks them to each pick out the two badest asses that they know. And he did that process until he had 20 people. He put them through this two- or three-week course, gave them the patch, and then sent them out against those hard targets. And at the time I talked to him, that 20-man force had been accounting for about 60 percent of the total casualties inflicted by the 4th Brigade. That's one of those kinds of things that I was talking about earlier—some of the gimmicks or the tricks.

Yes, the ESAF is upgrading the overall force—the force modernization, the force expansion business—but at the same time, maybe they are also starting to look at that second tier to create those special operating units that give them that rapid reaction capability. That gives them that ability to go out and enjoy some success while the overall ESAF is doing the longer term infrastructure type business with the overall force as a whole. It's just maybe one of those things that we want to consider and think about.

## ***Development of Intelligence Was Difficult***

***Ambassador Thomas Pickering***—We started out with some basic ideas on force structure, with the fact that the heavy

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

battalions could provide us with enough muscle to meet the guerrilla main force efforts. We had a program of expanding the heavy battalions. We also started out with the fact that light battalions had an important role. Partway through that process as we began to expand those, people like Domingo Monterosa and others made some suggestions for some improvements. We ended up with light battalions that were a little bit heavier and a number of heavy battalions which could operate really in half-battalion operations when they needed to. In addition, there was a strong interest in adding A37s and UH1Hs to the air to provide a big medical program whose lack had been recognized. And there was an effort to begin to develop a civil defense program, which was almost single-handedly developed by one of the sergeants (when we had to keep the heat on all the time to keep from losing). While I was there we began to see some successes. The development of intelligence, which always proceeded very slowly, was difficult. The Salvadorans got good at some of the technical intelligence collection. But in terms of human intelligence, they were much less adequate, although they worked better within the metropolitan areas. Then the guerrillas began to break down into small units as a result of their own strategic assessments of what they were up against, since they had exhausted themselves in their main force offensive. At the end of '83 and by '84, we were beginning to see small guerrilla units exploit the vulnerable areas and expand into other areas of the country. This seems to have been the watchword of their operations, really, since '84—a few well chosen, carefully timed, excellent strike operations to try to keep the government off balance. Some of those have been successful and some haven't; some succeeded and some failed. Despite constant efforts on our part, we were never terribly successful in dealing with the infiltration of essential supplies. This was something we could keep track of but never get on top of, in large measure, because there were difficulties with some corruption in the process as well as obvious inability to stay up with highly developed, well-run, clandestine networks.

The guerrillas tended to lose sight, in their own exhaustion as a result of the heavy operations, of how close they were to



success. They were very badly defeated in the ballot box, which, in terms of their political-military concept of activities, served to rock them back. In the meantime, we had begun extensive training activities, initially out of the country and later with the development of an in-country training establishment when it became no longer possible to work in Honduras. We worked very hard with the military to replace a number of the key people at the level of the territorial commands and to simplify the territorial commands, to use people who had some proven battlefield experience, and to replace people who showed weak leadership. It was very difficult for the Salvadorans because seniority, rather than proven merit, was the basic determinant of promotion. But the whole thing is replete with complex problems and great difficulties. We were trying new ideas all the time, not to the detriment basically of mainline developments, but constantly working with the Salvadorans, trying to develop new ideas and new tactical applications to deal with their problems and, further, to integrate intelligence to get real-time readings of opportunities and problems and to improve our own integration in the Embassy.

### *The Organization for Intelligence*

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—We have, presently, two intelligence organizations at the national level—the National Directorate of Intelligence (DNI), which depends directly on the Defense Ministry, and the C-2 of the Combined General Staff of the Armed Forces. Theoretically, the DNI was created to provide strategic intelligence, political intelligence, national intelligence: very high levels of intelligence. The type of intelligence developed in the Combined General Staff is a military operational intelligence at the strategic and tactical levels. Due to the current situation in this country and despite a series of political elements, along with social and economic repercussions, our struggle is still militaristic because the original conception of this war was based on a military attack by the insurgents.

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

The intelligence structure is focused on counteracting the military struggle. The DNI produces intelligence for military operations. It has not been very successful in terms of political strategic intelligence and intelligence at the state level because all of its efforts, its equipment and personnel training are geared towards developing intelligence exclusively for military operations.

The DNI receives internal and external support. With respect to the external support, the DNI receives most of its aid from the Central Intelligence Agency—CIA. The CIA provides some support to the C-2, such as direct training. But the whole product, the handling of sources, such as communications, traffic analysis, and equipment, is handed over to the DNI.

The assistance I receive consists of whatever the U.S. Mil Group provides me with. It includes analysis of operational areas, photography and imagery interpretation, interception of clandestine communiqués, and analysis of documents, along with Mil Group personnel support.

Another source of external support is the CAJIT [Central American Joint Intelligence Team]. They work directly with us. CAJIT's support consists of providing analysis of operational areas, imagery interpretation, a summary of events, archives and analysis, and exploitation of documents. Another source is the 470th MI [Military Intelligence] Group in Panama that provides support to all of Central America. We also receive elements from the J-2 along with Air Force elements from Howard (Air Base, Panama) and Marines from the naval bases. But it's not much.

The principal idea consists of an effort to integrate an intelligence system to support us. Most of this support is provided in conjunction with the CAJIT, especially in relation



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Colonel Juan  
Orlando Zepeda

to imagery interpretation, aerial photography and analysis, and exploitation of documents. Those are the three principal contributions and all based on external support.

Now, internally, our direct intelligence support comes from the S-2 or D-2 of the public security forces, which are the National Guard, the National Police, and the *Hacienda* Police. We have the capability, as an agency, to handle all of the intelligence products from agencies at brigade level and military unit levels such as the S-2, the BIRI (Rapid Reaction Battalion), the detachments. And also, the D-2 of the Air Force and national Marines that transmit, on a daily basis, all of the information that is collected. The Salvadoran Air Force is also being developed under my supervision. There are four organizations that deal with intelligence and help me to perform reconnaissance, area investigation, and photography in order to execute special intelligence operations. At present, we are structuring a special analytics center for the Air Force, which will integrate the four intelligence organizations.

Now, with regard to how the C-2 functions, I, myself, have different groups for tasks. I have a group that's dedicated to counterintelligence, which deals basically with the physical security of installations at the national level. It oversees the investigations of its own personnel to determine whether or not there are infiltrated elements. It also oversees the communications security system, proper transmissions, and our own monitoring equipment. Right now, we are working to develop a program for supervision at the national level. We have upgraded security measures on the handling of classified documentation and carefully supervise the transferring of these documents through our various intelligence channels. The operations section is divided into several subgroups. One group analyzes documents; another handles interrogation procedures where most of the information gathering function is at a national level, what the security forces do with the prisoners, number of people involved, etc. Another group is the Intelligence Register (RI). It registers all enemy activity at a national level and attempts to understand how and why the enemy functions. The RI performs the analysis and then transfers the information to

another group we refer to as Immediate Analysis. Other groups are the Interception of Technical Signals, IST, which intercepts clandestine communiqués, recordings that are signalled from Radio Venceremos and other radio channels, such as Farabundo, including those communiqués that originate from our local channels.

The group that deals with general archives was conceived to investigate specific dates which the enemy considers highly important. Both the Archives group and the Order of Battle group gather this information, analyze it. And, as a result we are able to determine all of the enemy's activities, locations, movements, personalities, tactics, and logistics activities. All of this information is gathered on a daily basis and then transferred to the Immediate Analysis group.

The Chief of Staff provides instructions as to how we are supposed to mobilize units within the intelligence systems. I have made a personal effort to see to it that this process materializes, and our success in preventing enemy activities is fulfilled by alerting our units to a possible enemy assault on such and such a day. We are able to prevent the enemy from attacking our installations due to 70-80 percent information with regard to their activities. I congratulate my people on their extreme precision. We function on a 24-hour basis. I have men deployed throughout most of the country—east, north, central, northeast—and I have specialized groups prepared to confront terrorists factions like the FPL and ER. So, we have the knowledge, and thus we are functioning.

The brigades have their own organizations, usually on a smaller scale. They have groups to analyze documents, a group for interrogations and some capability to intercept signals. But through national direction we have provided them with proper equipment for intercepting communiqués. They also have an intelligence register group. We then have a small group and the Combined Analysis Center, which functions at the brigade and S-2 levels. As a result you have a gathering of different garrison components that are in the vicinity such as the guard, national police, and the 30 or so different elements that work. I would venture to say that since last July, we have increased our data

collection capabilities due to the upgrading of our technical resources.

I would venture to say that, since last July we have increased our data collection capabilities due to the upgrading of our technical resources. Today we are able to gather more information because of the improvements we've made. Most of our information regarding enemy movements, locations, and activities derives from human sources. But our system enables us to better determine the specific clandestine sites of the enemy. Then, this system provides us with a location factor, but since most of the information is encrypted we have to rely on the human elements, the brigades and proper units. Each brigade has its own network system. The DNI relies on its own human sources and equipment, as does the C-2. I have some sources who are ex-terrorists infiltrated in different zones.

### *Another View of Intelligence*

**Colonel James J. Steele**—When I arrived here there was a tendency to focus on technical indicators. Those are useful, and I don't want to discount them, but in an insurgency the principal focus has to be on human aspects. That means agent networks. That means getting people to talk to you. It means reconnaissance patrols, and so on. That has been the emphasis for the last two years, and it has paid off. What happens is, when you get the human intelligence working, the technical indicators really do help. It fits together; you get a fusion and a synergistic effect.

We've gone through an evolution of types of intelligence trainers, and it's worked out pretty well. We have sergeants who were working out there developing a basic capability at the brigade level, starting off with basically getting them organized in terms of maps and keeping logs, and trying to develop some sort of data base. That was followed up with the development of

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

the Regional Intelligence Centers, which were able to build on the basic capability that had been developed there and eventually create a mini all-source analysis center or fusion center at the brigade level. This takes not only what was being gathered at the national level using platforms [aircraft and satellites, for example], intercepts, agent reports, and so on but also combining it with what was being developed at the brigade level, either through collection by tactical units in the field or by civil defense units. You have a lot of information sources to tap into with various National Guard and police units and any other source of information that may exist. It's a good effort. I think it shows a lot of potential. We probably took longer in the development of the intelligence effort than we should have, but it finally did come.

If you're looking at it from a lessons learned perspective, I would say that there are several lessons. One is to develop, early on, human capability. The second thing is that platforms can be extremely useful as long as they are complemented by human intel. Now the platforms are providing either a confirmation or they are providing some basis for focusing human intelligence.

The other lesson is that the more expensive platforms are probably something that the United States can provide. In other words, it's probably a mistake to think in terms of trying to develop a host country capability for sophisticated collection. This is going to be dependent upon the level of sophistication of the host country, its resources, and what it had before the war. But, the platforms are a good thing that we can provide for them during the crisis. The human capability is something that is indispensable for them before, during, and after the crisis. So, with heavy focus on developing their own indigenous capability for HUMINT [Human Intelligence], we provide the sophisticated platforms during the period of the crisis, then we withdraw them afterwards. Hopefully, their human capability can provide them with the necessary intelligence that they'll need to maintain control after we've gone.

HUMINT has taken away the mystique or fear that ground commanders would have that there might be thousands of

guerrillas in a sector. You do the ground work, and you find out that in the sector that you are going into, there may be 50 guerrillas. You know that there are 50 because you have their names, the order of battle, and you know how they're equipped, and so on. It just makes it an awful lot easier to go in there and deal with them. Almost inevitably you can go in there with smaller units and still have confidence that you can take those guerrillas on.

So, for you to ask the commander, "Do you know where all the guerrillas are right now?" the answer is probably, "No." On the other hand, if you ask him, "Where do they normally remain? Where are their base camps?" and "Are the base camps occupied or not occupied?" he'll probably know that. Things are getting better. That's a relative statement. There's still a lot of room for improvement.

### *The Logistics of the Offense*

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—Basically I would say that the Army reacts as rapidly as it can. It doesn't have the capability to make night insertions with its helicopters. They will, however, now move in with their reaction force in the face of heavy ground fire and, in fact, have taken heavy ground fire and had lots of helicopters shot up and taken casualties while they were making the insertion. They don't hesitate to go into a hot LZ. This is greatly changed from when I first arrived in November of 1983 when the forces which were inserted, were inserted in relatively secure areas where they seldom made contact on the insertion. In fact, their very disposition seemed to be designed so as not to run too much of a risk of making contact at all. That has changed completely. They appear to go in now and go in for blood. They'll land in the face of fire, and, in fact, they get in there as rapidly as they can. The attacks usually strike at about 0200 in the morning. That appears to be the favorite time, and that's due to the back planning factors necessary for the

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

guerrillas to make their final assembly and kick off an operation. But 0200 is the time it happens. The helicopters will land on the ground. The first wave will be on the ground and reacting somewhere around 0600 or 0630 in the morning. So that, now, does not give the guerrillas time enough to conduct an effective assault, exploitation, and evacuation. Every one of their attacks within the last year and a half or so has been stymied somewhere short of their being able to achieve their objective because of the reaction of the helicopters. The guerrillas now know that they have to clear the area before first light, and this doesn't leave them enough time to exploit an area. When I had first arrived, they would go in, assault an area, take it over, exploit for the entire full day period following the attack, and exit the area the following night. Even when the Salvadorans deployed their military personnel in response, they did not go in aggressively and retake the area. They waited until the guerrillas left and (then) reoccupied the area. That has stopped, so a great deal of progress has been made there.

Now the other type of reaction which occurs in the middle of the night, of course, is to pile everybody available into four to six 2-1/2 ton trucks and race off down the road to where the action is. This has almost always resulted in a disaster because the guerrillas always set up ambushes on one or several routes leading from the point of nearest reinforcement to the area where the action is. In fact, many times the majority of casualties are taken by the reaction force being ambushed in the vehicles in the wee hours of the morning as it speeds along a country road heading for the action. Trying to determine ways to react without losing more forces in your attempt to react is a big problem. The Salvadorans, for some reason or another—partly out of bravado, and partly for lack of a better solution—consistently responded in this fashion, piling everybody available into trucks and blazing off down the road and driving right into a very carefully established ambush. The helicopters preclude this, although it appears now that the guerrillas are getting better at setting up ambushes at the likely landing zones surrounding the area they're attacking. This means that there's an increased likelihood of the reaction force coming into a hot LZ.



Another problem is, I guess, twofold, because, as I mentioned before, logistical support by the helicopter is inadequate when they go out for several days at a time. They have to carry everything with them or try to carry everything with them, so they go out very heavily laden—30 to 50 pounds of junk on their backs. In addition to that, we've provided them with 81-mm mortars, with .50 caliber machine guns, 60-mm mortars, 90-mm recoilless rifles. And for some reason which I will discuss in a moment, but regardless of the reason, they packed the stuff—they backpacked the stuff with them on operations. So, you'll see one soldier carrying, to begin with, a pack with 30 or 40 pounds of stuff and then a .50 caliber machine gun tripod. Somebody else is carrying linked belts of .50 caliber ammunition. Another guy with a 90 [90-mm recoilless rifle] and another guy carrying 90-mm ammunition. All of this, basically what it means is, and I think there's a twofold result in this, that when they're so heavily laden, even if they're not carrying heavy crew-served weapons, just the junk they carry on their backs—I mean literally everything but the kitchen sink, from foam rubber pads to make the ground more comfortable to I don't know what the hell they have got stuffed in their packs, but far more than they ought to be carrying—with respect to the guerrilla, they have much less, much less mobility. Once, by the way, I did see them using animals to pack the stuff, the same as the guerrillas do. It is a smart move—they should use animals to pack the stuff rather than carry it themselves. They're in fine physical condition. They can haul stuff up and down hills all day long which would exhaust most people. They're really in good physical shape, but they simply can't move as fast as the guerrillas. When contact is made, they don't have the foot mobility to maneuver around and cover the ground fast enough to cut the guerrillas off. They are simply far less mobile than the guerrillas.

The other problem that I see in an insurgency type of environment is packing 90-mm recoilless rifles, 81-mm mortars. There is a tendency when they have such weapons to use the effective "standoff distance," if you will, of the crew-served weapons and hammer away at suspected guerrilla positions with

a .50 caliber machine gun, out of small arms range. I don't think that this is a lack of desire to close with the enemy or a lack of courage or anything like that. I see no indication that the Salvadoran soldier isn't a tough, gutsy fighter. It's just that because they've got this stuff, which we've given them, they seem to think that the approved solution is to mount the .50 and hammer away at the next hillside, much in the same manner as in Vietnam when we pounded places with air strikes to absolutely no avail. They do the same thing with whatever we give them, when the effective solution in a counterinsurgency war is to move off into the bush with your M-16 rifle and go after the enemy. An awful lot of ammunition gets fired-off out of range of the guerrillas, while they're probably still heading off and getting away with very little danger to them. The Salvadorans will be firing at them with their crew-served weapons and not causing any casualties. It's simply one more impediment to foot mobility and to closing quietly, stealthily, effectively with the enemy and getting some results with the M-16 rifle. To the extent that you convince them that their TO&Es [Tables of Organization and Equipment] should contain all of these crew-served weapons, to that extent you're making them into a conventional force, not an effective counterinsurgency force. In my opinion—and this is not the opinion, I believe, of the security assistance personnel who are helping them devise their TO&Es—it's counterproductive in many instances. To provide weapons of this type and to create Tables of Organization and Equipment that include these weapons because, although it makes the unit much more effective in the defense or the assault upon a fortified position, it makes it less likely that they will have foot mobility and be thinking in terms of closing into small arms range. They'll sit back and use their crew-served weapons rather than getting up close. The only way you can be effective is to get up close.



## *Recognizing the Psychological War*

### *Psychological Operations and Civic Action*

**Colonel James J. Steele**—There is an interest in PSYOP [Psychological Operations] and civic action within the Salvadoran armed forces that's far greater than anything that we saw in Vietnam. It's an integral part of what they're doing. The idea of getting people to defect is central to the plans of every brigade. They are training Psychological Operations experts for every unit. We've played a role in that process, and I think it's one of the things that we can really be proud of. They're putting out a lot of leaflets. They're using loud speakers. They're using radio spots very effectively. It hasn't always been that way. I think we played a role in that education process, but they've seen the results that've come from successful psychological operations, and that's been an impetus to what has been done.

They've put some good people into the program. The guy in charge of psychological operations who just [February 1987] turned it over was truly an evangelist. I can recall that he got up and gave a briefing—this was after a guy named Miguel

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

Castellanos, who was one of the political leaders of the FPL. They initiated a campaign around him. They put out posters. They put him on the radio. They put him on television, and he also helped them with their PSYOPS campaign. For example, it changed the whole approach on how they would deal with the guerrillas and deal with their supporters. For example, if you look at some of the early posters and early leaflets, it would be addressed to "terrorists," and then it would give the message. He said, "That's ridiculous! If you call someone a terrorist, you've immediately turned them off. They're not even going to read your message. Call them *compañero* or *compa*. That's what their fellow guerrillas call them. Present it that way and then get your message across. To the extent that you can make your propaganda look something like theirs, you'll get them to read it." Well that didn't sit well with all elements within the Salvadoran military.

I can remember sitting in a meeting.\* President Duarte was there, the whole high command, all of the brigade commanders, some of the departmental commanders, and the C-5 was giving a briefing on Psychological Operations. He started by saying—he was describing the campaign which revolved around Miguel Castellanos—"Now I know that there are a lot of you out there who don't agree with what we're doing. You don't like the idea of glorifying Miguel Castellanos, who is a former guerrilla, former terrorist, and so on. And you don't like the way we have changed some of the posters and leaflets, in terms of the way that we address the guerrillas, but I really don't care what you think. This message is not for you. It's for them! What we're trying to do is to get them to defect. We're not trying to make you happy. I know that some of you have said that it looks like what we are trying to do is get Miguel Castellanos elected as President." There were a few snickers from Duarte. Then he said, "That's not what we're trying to do. What we are trying to do is to use Miguel Castellanos and use this message to discredit the guerrilla organizations internally." Now you don't

\*CPC, a periodic meeting between the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command and the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador.

find that kind of animosity. There's been an education process, and every brigade commander (some obviously better than others) is on board with psychological operations.

But, with the reduction of the number of insurgents there is another problem—we're getting down to a more hard core element. They're less susceptible to psychological operations. It probably means, then, that they have to focus more on them in an indirect way. In other words, focus on *masas*, family members, because they're probably the only way that you will get to these guys. You can talk to them directly with propaganda with probably very little effect. But, if you can convince people in their family that the situation has changed and that what they went to the mountains for five or six years ago has happened, really, in some respects, they've won, then, you may get them to come in. That's where they have to be increasingly focusing their attention in the years ahead.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—We struggled with that. In my time there it was just beginning. It was possible for them to deal with the mechanics of it. It wasn't possible in my time to evaluate the success or failure. One of the things that was most interesting was that in my last six or eight months there were a number of significant defections. My view was that they came less as a result of psy-war campaigns than as a result of a very tough evaluation by some of the more committed guerrilla leaders as to the dichotomies and difficulties of their own position. Some of it had to do with internal conflicts, but it was more a question of the conflict that they saw between their own objectives and where they saw the government going. So it was really logic and reality that dictated why some of these guys came over. Some were people who had been very important and very influential in the guerrilla movement. Partly it was wearing down; partly it was the lack of military success; partly it was the beginning of the government's espousal of some of the basic objectives that people had gone into the guerrilla movement to achieve in the first place, and a feeling that the government

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

might be in a position of actually meeting their objectives, and a beginning of confidence that the government wasn't going to torture them or kill them all off or destroy them if they turned themselves in.

So the notion of an amnesty campaign, the notion of psychological warfare, gave that final opening to these individuals. I don't think necessarily the publication of the arguments made all that much difference. It may have helped. It is very difficult to evaluate those kinds of things, and as I say, someone who has been there for the last two years and seen whether that made any indentation or not would be in a much better position to evaluate that. When I was there it was just beginning to be planned and put into effect. They had done quite a bit of work and had begun leaflet campaigns and loudspeaker campaigns. They began trying to get across to the guerrillas in many other ways what was going on. The elections, themselves, were one of the important psychological activities, as was the failure of the guerrillas consistently to move from military victory to military victory or to turn the population radically in any direction. In addition, guerrilla defections at high levels added to later defections.

### ***In the Beginning They Took No Prisoners***

**C-5 Spokesperson**—I don't know if before 1983 they had something comparable, but the current C-5 that exists was created in 1983. When they first started, the main target was the enemy forces. The origin of psychological operations in El Salvador was part of a general change in the Salvadoran Army behavior. During the 1980-1982 period they had a policy, according to different sources (I am not just basing my comments on one source), that they generally did not take prisoners. The first change came as the U.S. advisors pressured

C-5 Spokesperson, name and position withheld by request of the individual and with the concurrence of responsible U.S. and Salvadoran officials, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 28 September 1987.



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**In San Francisco Chinadega, members of a newly formed civil defense unit parade.**

them to be more humane in their treatment of prisoners for two reasons. First is the human rights political situation; as long as the Salvadorans were violating human rights, this presented a problem in terms of getting aid, not only from the United States, but also from European countries.

So, the improvement in human rights was presented to the Salvadorans as a way of getting more military aid, which they needed. It was a reasonable proposition and they accepted it. I think they saw what happened to Somoza, when everybody in the world turned their backs, and I think the Salvadorans, themselves, realized that they had to improve their international image. Now there has been a tremendous insurgent propaganda campaign to the effect that nothing has changed in El Salvador and that the Army still doesn't take prisoners and still massacres civilians. That simply is not factual any more. Sure, some violations still occur, just like violations occurred in Vietnam with the U.S. Army, and will occur in any army waging counterinsurgency. But the situation has fundamentally improved. There has been a fundamental change in attitude.

There has been a fundamental change in behavior of the Salvadoran Army, towards prisoners and towards civilians.

The second reason for the change was common sense. It was also because of practical utility and again, I think, was the result of the pressure from the U.S. advisors. The advisors convinced the Salvadorans that you can get intelligence out of prisoners. That when treated properly the value of a prisoner who decides to give information is much greater than the prisoner who is dead. It may be more satisfying to see them dead, but in terms of utility, it is better to have the guy alive. Even if a prisoner does not collaborate, it's still good to keep the guy alive because that bolsters your claim that you have changed your procedures and that it's to his benefit to collaborate with the armed forces.

Since '83 a large number of guerrillas, either captured or who have turned themselves in, have provided valuable information to the Salvadoran armed forces in terms of tactical military intelligence. It is now quite commonplace in the brigades to have informants who were former guerrillas. That situation did not exist in '81 or in '82, as far as I know, but it exists now, because the behavior and the strategy of the Salvadoran armed forces have become more enlightened and more sophisticated. I guess the level of sophistication and the way the Salvadorans treat prisoners and treat defectors is not evident in other countries. That is another thing that I think the Salvadoran Army gets a bad rap for. The international press still paints them as these troglodytes. But actually in terms of sophistication of prisoner handling or defector handling, they are light years ahead of many other Third World countries, perhaps most other Third World countries. I don't think there is a common awareness of that.

Successful psychological operations began as the Army began to shift behavior. Forgetting about the international human rights issue, at brigade level, the first shift or change in attitude towards prisoners was that they were seen now as sources of intelligence. As a logical outflow of that, they also began to be seen as PSYOP collaborators. The emphasis increasingly became, "How can we convince the guerrillas to





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Army troops present weapons to civil defense unit members. These units form under community initiatives or at the request of the Army.

defect?" Obviously, the most convincing way to get guerrillas to defect was to use former guerrillas. That is the whole process that led to Commander Miguel Castellanos. In a former time, as soon as Miguel Castellanos would have come in contact with the police, they would have killed him. Just like they killed the whole FDR leadership in one meeting. They just kidnapped the whole leadership and killed them all. It has never been established exactly who did that, but there was a time here when political opponents were just assassinated out of hand. Now if they get a guerrilla commander or he comes in contact with the police, the first reaction is, well, how can we use this guy? That is a quantum leap. That is what separates El Salvador from a lot of other countries.

The decision was made to start psychological operations, and it was part of this whole process of change. The main target

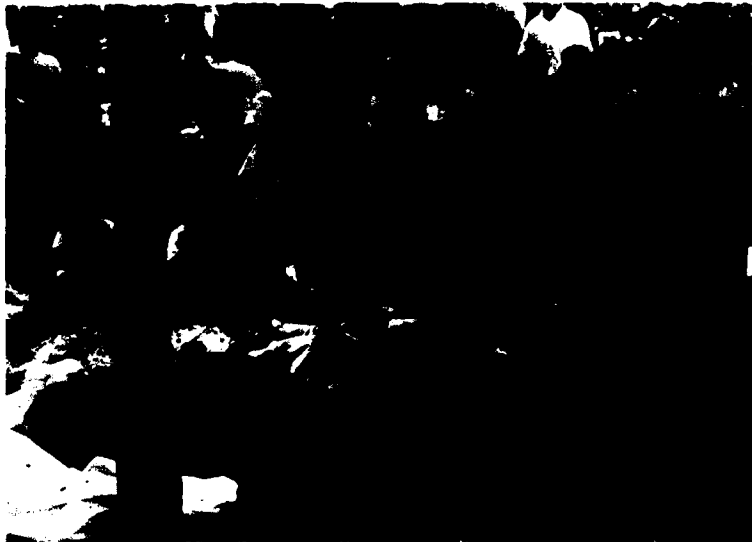
was enemy forces. The Salvadorans themselves put out the first message to these people. Since they were new at this, my opinion is that they were not very good. For example, they would address the guerrillas as terrorists. When I first came to El Salvador in '84, it still was almost an unwritten rule that you could not call the guerrillas, guerrillas. You could not use the term guerrilla here within Army publications or Army audio-visual material. They were terrorists. They had to be called terrorists. They were not insurgents, they were not revolutionaries, they were terrorists. There is a legal reason.

Everybody harped back on the legal reason, saying, well, we don't want to recognize them as a belligerent force, and basically we just want to treat them as criminals, as bands of criminals. Well, that's fine except these bands of criminals, at that time, were taking over major towns in the interior, were overrunning *cuartels*, and, furthermore, by any kind of analytical definition, they were not just terrorists. They had an infrastructure. They had a political movement. They had organized mass support. They had all the indicators that they were a genuine insurgent movement. An interesting evolution has happened. Nowadays [in September '87], more than ever the term terrorist fits these guys. Because of the things they are doing now—the mining, the transportation barriers, where they machine gun even Red Cross ambulances. Now they really are acting like terrorists. It's interesting that in the days when they were really acting like insurgents, the Army insisted on calling them terrorists. And now when the Army is more willing to call them by a variety of terms, more and more they have become real terrorists.

### ***Evolution: The Integration of Psyops, Civil Affairs and Intelligence***

**Major General James R. Taylor**—It seems to me that there are two things that are important. First of all, the greenhouse of

Major General James R. Taylor, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama), 1986 to 1987, interviewed at Fort Amador, Republic of Panama, 14 December 1986.



DONEHOO

**In November 1987, at Candelavin, La Paz, four civil defense members died, kidnapped and murdered by the FMLN.**

the revolution goes directly back to the role of the armed forces in the society of Salvador. When the situation finally boiled up and flamed over in the late seventies and early eighties, the armed forces and the police structure in Salvador was much smaller than it is now and much less responsive to the needs of the people and particularly to the needs of the government. They were, in fact, a government unto themselves. This came about as a result of the standard kinds of things found in many developing countries—a large percentage of land ownership by a favorite few, the policies of the government which supported the power structure that existed both in the government and in the armed forces, and the interplay between those two institutions.

All of that culminated in the student riots, against which the armed forces were overly brutal. The creation of the death squads and many other things gave a free entree to the leftists, really to the FMLN and the people that have been trained in Cuba and Nicaragua. But more importantly, it generated the

support from the people to give the revolutionaries a base of power from which they could work.

Probably the most remarkable thing about the Salvadoran experience is that we started from that low point with respect to the armed forces and have overseen the growth and the training of what is now approaching a very professional Army. Even more important, a very professional national police organization that is genuinely responsive and supportive of President Duarte and, to a lesser degree, his administration.

Now we have the seeds, the beginning, of a mutual working relationship between the various government ministries, the armed forces, and the police which provides the ability to conduct combined arms and joint operations in the field on a continuing basis. Also we have the ability to perpetuate those operations over time, as they have in the Guazapa area over the last 12 months. Logistically, with intelligence and with the common support, they have the ability required to run those extended successful operations, to integrate civil affairs operations and PSYOP operations, and, maybe most important of all, with the creation and integration of an intelligence infrastructure that is now generating real time, fairly accurate intelligence, which the high command actually reacts to and acts against successfully.

As I said earlier, the integration of intelligence, PSYOP, civil affairs, and, most importantly, an ability to react to what's going on out in the field quicker than the enemy can react all combine to show a positive evolution of the El Salvadoran military.

**Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez**—I returned to Chalatenango, with the democratic government in power and President Duarte performing his functions. I was named Commander of the Fourth Brigade in El Paraíso, in August 1984—eight months after the guerrillas had destroyed it [December 1983]. The Department of Chalatenango is a very mountainous department, very difficult, and very poor. At that time there were too many legendary stories about the guerrillas owning the department.

Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez, Fourth Brigade Commander, 1982 and 1984-1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 October 1987.



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Ana Isabel Henriguez, March 1986, Morazan, the innocent victim of an FMLN land mine.

Practically, I began by realizing that the troops had very low morale. It was a unit that had been beaten in its garrison—a very poorly built garrison in a valley surrounded by hills. It would be very easy to attack—with a machine gun, the troops would be paralyzed. We started by motivating, and we managed to lift up the troops. I began looking for better advice from the North Americans. Specifically, I asked them to give me sergeants or captains but no colonels—the colonels who were here spent their time playing mini-golf and swimming in the pool. Sergeants and captains are people to train troops. From this request, I had the opportunity to have two good officers—Captain Phillips and Captain Sheehan. Very good brigade officers, worked 25 hours-a-day, very aware, and they helped me a lot. I would tell them what I wanted, and they would look around for means to help me solve the problem. I knew I needed to mount a good intelligence unit. We managed to mount a 24 hours-a-day tactical operations center, with good communications and good training of the troops. I was also able

to mount a section of psychological operations with our own pamphlets, spots on the local radios, broadcasting to the town's people, to the guerrillas, to the troops themselves.

We began a different type of war with the objective to penetrate the minds of the guerrillas and the minds of the civilian population. The civilian population in Chalatenango was very apathetic, with a lot of years of guerrilla presence, not very receptive to the armed forces. A very poor people, people with a lot of rancor. As we began the task, more than anything else I was worried about the civilian population more than the guerrillas. We began to execute operations with trained units, units of 500 men—smaller battalions, more mobile and more operational.

On 12 October 1984 (two months after taking command) in a rather daring operation, surprisingly, we took the city of La Palma—three days before the first meeting between the President and the guerrillas. I believed that we, not the guerrillas, should have been in La Palma when the President arrived to speak. To my surprise we took the city in a night motorized operation, without lights and without firing one shot. We captured guerrillas by surprise, and they would say, “... *compañeros, compas.*” “Yes, we are *compas*....” We captured many guerrillas, many documents. I went in a helicopter very early that morning. The troops were still entering into La Palma, as I was landing. It was then we realized that the guerrillas had been using propaganda in talking about their strength. In reality, there were not great numbers of guerrillas. We thought there were great numbers. Through propaganda, with a presence of 10-15 men scattered all over, they gave us the impression of being thousands of guerrillas. In other words it was very easy to defeat the guerrillas militarily, politically, and psychologically.

That triggered a spark in me, an idea, and we began to locate the guerrillas everywhere. We began to receive information from the civilian population freely, not purchased. The information was not given in the *cuartels* but, rather, in many different places. We had intelligence networks all over

such places as breweries, *pupusa*\* stands, stores, buses, and the bus depots. We began to understand the real strength of the guerrillas. I saw a little bit of the FPL, a little bit of the FARN, a little bit of the FAL. There was no ERP, no PRTC.

We consolidated the elements: first, with the presence of the Army in the area in mobile form, not static. Secondly organizing the communities with the mayor at the head.

Year after year, the Catholic church celebrates each patron saints' holidays. The towns were organized, since the colonial days, to celebrate patron saints' holidays. We use that organization ourselves in the towns. With the mayor at the head for two reasons: for the following civic development program and to organize a self-defense—but not a civil defense, which is different—not with arms. I was not in agreement with giving the civil defense carbines or M-14 rifles, because they were not yet "conscientized." A civilian who is not aware doesn't fight. It's better to have them without arms but, by creating an ideological wall in the people, to have them help us give talks to the students in the scholastic centers. In other words, participate as informants but not as combatants. The guerrillas attack when they are alone, attack them and obtain arms because they don't fight. At that time, there was no need to give them arms but, rather, the knowledge that they would get arms in one or two years.

Another element of this great development plan was the need to develop the areas which are consolidated. Develop them with the efforts of the government, the infrastructure of the government—mainly the ministries of agriculture and cattle, education, public health, public works—and, with the support of the Army, the private sector, and the support of the people themselves. They are the four forces that must join together, for example, to reconstruct roads, bridges, schools, clinics, open new schools, new centers, to take potable water, telephones, etc., etc., etc. I believe this to be the key thing, and perhaps with the intelligence, dividing the areas by zones. Not understanding how it was done in Vietnam where the red areas

\*Indigenous cornmeal-based tortilla with cheese or pork fat.

were bombed. No, rather, that the red, pink, and white areas we would see signalled on the map would be the areas of major guerrilla persistence to be able to follow up. In that way, I believe success was obtained in Chalatenango. Unfortunately, the political side never stops playing dirty tricks on the military, and that is where the problem lies.

### ***A Most Successful Operation— Civil Affairs***

***Colonel Leopoldo Antonio Hernández***—The responsibility of the First Brigade lies specifically in the area of Cerro Guazapa, which, according to the guerrillas' propaganda, was a stronghold of their operations. The hill is located 35 kilometers northeast of the capital. It is a very small mountain range which goes through the central part of the country and is surrounded by cities like Aguilaes, Suchitoto, Tenancingo, Oratorio de Concepcion, San Jose Guayabal, Tonacatepeque, and Guazapa. Through the use of their propaganda the guerrillas were able to influence public opinion and convince people that they were the owners of Cerro Guazapa.

The First Brigade has successfully conducted many military operations in the area. But the most successful ones have been since 1985. At that time, we began working with a new policy of rescuing the *masas*, who were controlled by the guerrillas in order to obtain supplies, information, agricultural tasks, and to fortify the land. In 1985 we rescued approximately 500 *masas*, and with that rescue mission we gave the people the understanding that the armed forces was respectful of human rights, although that is not the way it is identified by the communications media.

Colonel Leopoldo Antonio Hernández, former First Brigade Commander and now Vice-Chief of the Salvadoran General Staff, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987.



As a result of the success of the rescue missions, on January 9, 1986, we initiated a program called Operation Phoenix, in which we were able to rescue once again 600 *masas* and deliver them to the Red Cross and their families for relocation somewhere else. With Operation Phoenix we dismantled all of the guerrilla's communication system. Due to the configuration of the terrain and the altitude which rises 1,435 meters above sea level, it was very propitious for a communication system to be set up in Cerro Guazapa. You can see the different altitudes from the peak of Guazapa. That is how we were able to dismantle their communication system, their supplies, and their clandestine field hospitals.



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Colonel Leopoldo  
Antonio Hernández

With Operation Phoenix we've also improved certain conditions in this country. We, as soldiers, have reopened roads which had been closed previously due to natural defects, vegetation overgrowth, and combat. We opened one road which leads through San Francisco to Suchitoto, a length of 19 kilometers, and other roads in the same area. The road from Hacienda Colima to La Caja. And other roads located in a different area which has been cultivated for sugar cane. In 1986, with the reopening of the road we encouraged the landowners to cultivate their lands—from San Francisco mill to a town called Los Almendros; Pueblo Viejo, as well as from Colima towards La Caja, thus having increased the production of basic grains. It is possible that this year the property owners will cultivate their lands once again in larger acreage.

We have been working continually on Operation Phoenix for the past year. The guerrilla screams that it is a failure. But it isn't a failure because we have conveyed great confidence to the people of Aguilares, El Paisnal, and Guazapa. We have also performed work on the town of El Paisnal, which was attacked

by guerrillas, who destroyed its health clinics, City Hall, and ANTEL's telephone services. We have worked on the highway that goes from Aguilares to El Paisnal and to another area called Las Delicias. We have restored the electricity, telephone services. With the plan Unidos Para Reconstruir, projects for reconstruction have been developed for the units of health and City Hall, telephone services and electrical services for improvements of living conditions at El Paisnal. The Ministry of Education has supported by placing teachers to provide education for the children in that area. At the present time, we are working on the reopening of the highway that goes from El Paisnal to Tacachico, which is located in the Department of La Libertad. The purpose for opening these roads is to provide the landowners with the opportunity to make a living and to reactivate the country's economy.

In addition to the military operations we have undertaken during 1986, we have also developed civic action programs providing medical attention, deliveries of food and clothing, and recreational games for children (such as clown shows and piñata parties). And at night time, through the use of a 16-mm movie camera, we show films which are rented in San Salvador.

### ***Joining Civil Defense: A Vote for the Government***

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**—I haven't read much about civil defense [CD], maybe a very incomplete study. I guess we have gotten into and out of civil defense a couple of times and El Salvador has old civil defense and new civil defense. In fact, civil defense was a part of the problem in the pre-coup and shortly after the coup time frame. We now have 260-270 *municipios* [municipalities] in the country. There are a certain

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

number of other urban areas that are sufficiently large or important to warrant having a civil defense site, so we say we have a total goal of 303 civil defense sites throughout the country. We have 104 of the new, and we have a total of about 220 old and new. Talking to the new, the idea was that you would go into a municipality and try to generate in them the interest and the support for the creation of a 50-man civil defense unit. Once they bought into that, we held a civil defense school where we trained five-man Salvadoran teams, who would then go into the community and train up their force. Then, once that force was trained, we would equip and arm them. We started off with carbines; it's now M-14s. Basically all this guy got was a weapon and two magazines, a slap on the rear-end, and an insurance policy. If he gets killed his family will get \$1,000 compensation. No uniform, no pay. Very, very little. It's a program that has had mixed reviews. If you go visit one of these sites, and if you are looking for the *Wehrmach*, it's going to bring tears to your eyes. Some of these guys have got teeth, but not too many. I saw one who had shaved, and some of them even have shoes.

Defense and local security isn't all that great in some cases. I'm telling you the down side. The positive side is that a lot of those guys actually fight and actually do, from time to time, take on the guerrillas and win. The idea is that they are not to be doing offense or even defensive patrolling. They are just to help protect their little town. They go to sleep, and the guerrillas walk in, cut their throats or shoot them, and walk away with 50 weapons. Or they just don't do a very good job, and the guerrillas decide they want to go in there. They can mass and come at them and take them. There are some critics. There is a tendency to say, "Well, if we are going to do this, we really ought to do it better." I would just like to argue in favor of the program we would have—as imperfect as it is. First of all, it is a very cheap combat multiplier. We now have 104 new, or 220 total, of these little CD sites out there that, as imperfect as they are, constitute a force that is on our side versus the other side. As this war has progressed, there are areas of this country where you still have a guerrilla presence, but it's

basically a three-, five-, or eight-man guerrilla presence, which our little guys without very many teeth can handle in a lot of cases. Another point—what is one of the things that we talk about in an insurgent war? What's the term that Harry Summers uses, "center of gravity," or one of those key points, one of those things that you absolutely have to do. One of the things we say is that you have to isolate the guerrilla from the population. Well, you create this little CD and you do that. If I'm Joe Guerrilla walking down the trail and I know that there is a CD in there, I don't just walk in there and get a Coke, anymore. Now, if I want to, I can, but now my stomach has to start pumping a little juice. Because I have my weapon and that guy isn't very good, I can probably take him, but this just might be the night I don't come back and so maybe I don't need that Coke that bad. Maybe I'll just walk on down the road to Smithville because they don't have a CD site. Or, people say that they can just cache their arms and come in and get whatever they want anyway. Well, they kind of can, but it's a different guerrilla that walked in. It's not a guerrilla that walked in with his weapon saying, "I'm a guerrilla, and look out for me. I'm bad and I can do anything I want or take anything I want." Just by my presence—my armed presence—I demonstrate the inability or the weakness of the national government. To the contrary, if I have to go hide my weapon and slip into town and slip out of town, I have made a pro-government statement. For nothing—a weapon and two magazines. We have gone a long way, although imperfectly, towards accomplishing one of the major things we say we have set out to do, which is isolate the guerrilla from the population.

In a democracy like this one, or in many insurgencies, what you find are large parts of the population who aren't either terribly pro or terribly contra. They are just sitting on the fence. When a community takes on a civil defense site, they have said, "I am now a government town." They may not believe that, or they may not be completely convinced, but they just voted. They have said, "No, I'm not on the guerrilla side. I'm on the government side. Maybe not 100 percent. Maybe you can drive me off of that, but we have, in effect, taken a vote." That is

now a government town. That's a town that has taken a stance. That is pretty powerful stuff for zip, next to nothing.

### ***Leadership Is the Key to Success***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—There were a lot of people that we had to work around in El Salvador that were in positions of power. Departmental commanders who were sorry, who were corrupt, who were cowardly. You just have to acquire patience and just keep pressing for their removal and get the right guys in the right jobs. Encourage emulation of that which works. One of the things we tried to do, we kind of jokingly say we'd like to do, is clone Ochoa because he was so effective out in the countryside. If we could have gotten all 14 departmental commanders to initiate barefoot patrols, to have mobile patrol bases, to keep moving, to keep the guerrillas off balance, it would have been a lot easier to deal with them. So, you know, you identify leaders that have got things going, that are doing things right, and you talk them up. We probably overdid it with Ochoa by turning him into a media event, and he began to read his own press clippings. You know, we did a pretty good job of identifying people who needed to go and people who needed to be emulated. Again, there's just no substitute for knowledge and understanding of the area and doing your homework.

They also learned that you have to have good small unit leaders. That the system that they were producing leadership under wasn't sufficient to meet their needs, so they had to *modify it*. They learned that you could train small units to operate independently and survive. They have learned that you have to have a well-trained or adequately trained civil defense to provide the first line of defense. And in nuts and bolts things you have to start with intelligence. All initiatives have to be

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

coupled with PSYOPS (Psychological Operations) with public works, and the military has to be viewed as part of the solution, not part of the problem. I think they learned that in many cases they are their own worst enemy. The way they've always done business—some of the corruption, some of their connections with the oligarchy, some of the death squad activities—is really counterproductive, not just in terms of their own population, but definitely when it is going to have an impact on the U.S. willingness to support. So they became very astute about the need for a better image, both internally and internationally. They have realized something they have always known instinctively—that there is no substitute for good combat leaders, competent leaders in the field. People like Monterosa and others that were so effective. They were effective because they put themselves at the head of the troops and shared the risks. Garrison commanders could no longer behave the way that their leadership did business. They had to go out and lead the troops and go in harm's way with the troops. War has a way of weeding out the nonplayers. The troops have a way of weeding them out. Units perform well with leadership. Nothing new; no secret there. But if you have good leadership and you care about the troops, the troops will follow you to hell and back.



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## *The Armed Forces at the End of 1986*

THE EDITORS—Although there is ample evidence that the armed forces made significant improvement between 1982 and the end of 1986, it appears that they have not yet reached the point where they understand the various centers of gravity and can deal effectively with them. For example, intelligence organizations are still not capable of knowing exactly where the insurgent leadership is at a given point in time and thus are unable to destroy or neutralize that particular center of gravity. It appears that the war is at the point where the insurgents cannot win, but neither can the military. A major influence on the war and the government's capability to prosecute the war was the impact of the earthquake on 10 October 1986. In seven seconds the earthquake did more damage than seven years of insurgent violence.

### *The Different Services*

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—When you talk about different services, you're really talking about one large service, excluding the security forces; people who belong to the armed

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

forces. Although they have specialized training if they're in the Air Force or in the Navy, or some specialized training in the Army, and although the Navy and the Air Force wear different uniforms, in effect they're essentially part of the same service and respond to the same command system. If we look at the services individually, I think we can say that the Army, in the course of the period of time I was there, showed many improvements. It went from a point where there was some question as to whether it would stay the course and wouldn't just simply disintegrate before the threat, to a point where we could be assured that the Army can hold its own. There is no question now, and there hasn't been for approximately a year and a half, of the ability of the Army to stave off defeat by the insurgents. They have reached a point where their basic skill levels are adequate, and their morale and esprit de corps are such that they won't be defeated by the insurgents.

But, the Army, still by virtue of its organization and its armaments, tends to be more of a conventional force than a counterinsurgency force, and the skills necessary for successful counterinsurgency operations are not really as strong in the Army as they need to be.

The real problem is that neither have they reached a level where they, themselves, have the capability to defeat the insurgents. The point appears to have been reached, or is about to be reached, where infusions of additional training and additional materiel will not result in improvements so that the Army can go out and beat the insurgents. They've reached the point where some definite institutional changes need to be made.

Of the three forces—Army, Air Force, and Navy—perhaps the Air Force, from the beginning and probably still, is the most capable and most professional force. I think one of the reasons for this is that airplanes, if not properly flown and properly maintained, tend to fall out of the sky. So you have to have a certain basic level of professionalism to even have an air force. The Air Force operates under the command of General Juan Rafael Bustillo, who is a very independent guy. A pilot, a professional air force type. Unfortunately, in providing support



to the Army, especially lift helicopters, he tends to hold his resources back—conserving fuel, conserving flight hours, and conserving his aircraft. The result being that the Army is only marginally supported, sometimes adequately for an initial insertion, but for follow-on logistical support the Army seldom receives adequate support. Battalions were operating in northern Morazán with only two lift helicopters providing the logistic support for all five battalions. The Air Force contains not only the direct air support aircraft. But it also has the lift capability—the UH1H helicopters—as well as the airborne battalion, which belongs to the Air Force. General Bustillo tends to hold his helicopters in what I can only describe as “in reserve” to support his airborne battalion as an immediate reaction force so that the full utilization of the lift assets is not employed.

The Navy was the weakest of the three services when I first arrived. It slowly made improvements. It was initially alleged that the Navy was involved in some sort of shrimp smuggling operation, and the details of that are rather involved and interesting. It appears that that has pretty much been put to a stop, but the Navy has the longest way to go to become a professional service. It still lacks sufficient personnel and sufficient vessels to adequately patrol the coast of El Salvador and stop the infiltration of goods across the shore.

## *The Army in 1986*

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—There are a lot of people saying that because the military portion has diminished somewhat from a large scale to much smaller things that the war is virtually won.

Yeah, but I’m not ready to have a victory parade yet. There are too many things wrong with the Salvadoran economy. There’s too much yet to be done. Compensation’s not complete. The reforms are not complete. It’s still a matter of will and

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

there's still the matter of Salvadorans continuing to deal and grapple with social, political, economic and military problems. What concerns me is the professional class. Watch the professionals. When they start bailing out, it will mean that they no longer see a future. There's a lot of pessimism right now. Part of it's due to Duarte's policies. Will they be able to ride this out as they've ridden out all these other crisis? If you go back and look at the newspapers in '82, '83, and '84, it was all doom and gloom—they weren't going to survive. But they mastered the 40 percent Salvadoran solution—they muddled through it.

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—The Ambassador, the Mil Group commander, the Deputy Chief of Mission and the USSOUTHCOM commander were saying (and had been saying for a year or so until the time I left) that the Salvadoran military had taken the initiative from the guerrillas. I never agreed with that, and I didn't hesitate to say so when I thought it was appropriate. The Ambassador never called me down for differing with him. He never chewed me out or told me to be quiet. He let me write my reports, and he let me brief people as I saw the situation and respected my intellectual independence in that regard.

I believe that the initiative in an insurgency consists of a great deal more than simply building oneself up to the point that you can—normally, generally—effectively confront the insurgents someplace in a firefight. It's more than simply forcing the insurgents to regress to an earlier phase of an insurgency.

The insurgents, in fact, had broken down into smaller groups. They were no longer a constant threat to major installations. The Army was no longer in danger of cracking or coming apart. The situation had pretty much stabilized. This contrasted sharply with when I first got there. This represented success from the perspective of the Embassy and from the

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

perspective of the security assistance effort. The country was out of danger for the time being. Then we said, "Now they're reverting to urban terrorism out of desperation. They've broken down into smaller groups. They can no longer successfully attack major targets. Therefore, we've got the initiative." I said, "Uh, uh." The initiative consists of and is obtained only at such time as the military and security forces are successfully able to protect elected officials (they never were) and prevent interdiction of traffic (they never were). Prevent the guerrillas from coming in at night to various communities and propagandizing people or collecting war taxes or policing up young people for service with the guerrillas. The guerrillas were always able, right up until the time I left, to require people to grow cotton or to grow coffee. The guerrillas were determining the wage structure for the workers. The guerrillas were requiring planters to plant a certain amount of their cropland in maize to feed the guerrillas. The guerrillas were collecting a certain amount of money for every hectare that was planted or every bushel that was harvested. In other words, there was still a close interaction.

Even though the guerrillas were reduced in numbers, and could no longer win in an open fight, they nevertheless, had essentially the same direct interface with the population whenever the military wasn't there to prevent it from happening. I said "You can't say you have the initiative in an insurgency until you can prevent that, until you can get between the guerrillas and the civilian population. And what's more, to say they [the Salvadoran military and security forces] have the initiative implies that you have a campaign plan that sees you through to a successful insurgency termination, which I define as victory." I don't accept negotiated solutions as being even a possible solution. The only final, acceptable solution is for the guerrillas to say, "I quit! Here's my rifle. I'm going to vote next time. Please don't shoot me," and the government pardons him and says, "Okay, go back to whatever you used to do before you were a guerrilla."

## ***Earthquake: The Military Loses Momentum and Insurgents Re-Arm***

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**—I got here in the wake of the earthquake that colored everything. The earthquake was 10 October 1986. I got here October 25. We were very much in the recovery mode, and that dominated just about everything that we did. As a result, there was fairly strong cohesion within the government at that time, just as you would expect in the wake of a national disaster of that magnitude. People were still in the mode of pulling together in the wake of that tragedy. So it was, in that regard, a good time. The armed forces had acquitted themselves very well. The government had recognized them for having done so—pretty much of a honeymoon period. Militarily it was the beginning of a down turn for us. If you paint this whole experience as a sine wave, a series of ups and downs, this was the beginning of one of those downs. The year had started out on a very positive note. Operation Phoenix, that kicked off in January, 1986, was a major operation with major, major ESAF successes. People were feeling pumped up and positive about themselves, but, by the time I got here, there was a series of things coming together to take the wind out of their sails. You had the earthquake. You had a public statement that “We are not going to turn inward. We are not going to let this earthquake take the steam out of our war-fighting effort. We understand that there is still a war to be fought.” However, it would be unrealistic to have expected the Altamondo, the Administer of Defense, and the Blandóns and those fellows in the *Estado Mayor*, here in the city, not to have diverted a major part of their effort just to digging out from underneath the rubble.

Despite their best efforts not to do so and all their rhetoric to the opposite, it did take away some of their interest and effort and energy, and that was felt in the field. The Salvadoran Army

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

is no different than ours. If my boss is in my knickers from time to time, it keeps me honest. Not that I am a bum or a goof-off, but we all need somebody jabbing us with a sharp stick from time to time just to keep us on our toes and keep us moving and, especially, keeping us all moving in the same direction. Absent some of that, the armed forces drifted a little in the wake of the earthquake. You add to that the fact that the guerrillas unilaterally declared a stand down or a truce in the wake of the earthquake. They kind of went away for a while, which, again, gave you the slack. It took the "omph" out of things. It caused the ESAF to lose some of that momentum, because for about 30 or 45 days, there was nobody out there to go against. Then you add to that the fact that it is about this time of year you go into the harvest season. You have to divert sizable chunks of your armed forces to protecting the coffee, the cotton, and the sugar cane harvests, as opposed to participating in the offensive operations.

Those three factors together took the ESAF into a lull, especially in comparison to what we had seen during the early part of '86. I don't think anybody needs to be terribly apologetic for that. It was kind of an inevitable or logical outgrowth of those kinds of things. People were aware of it. They tried to beat it off with words, but they were not very successful. No great, earthshaking, long-term ramifications, but the question was, "What did I find when I got here?"

I got here at the beginning of a three- or four-month dip, in terms of tempo or the spirit of the armed forces. Right at the first of the year the guerrillas came out strong. I think it was 29 December they hit Cerro Delicias, down by San Vicente. Caught those folks sleeping at the switch and came on in and did them dirt—killed about 16 or 17. Then the first week or two of January, you had a series of incidents, up around Osicala, Gótera, Delicias Concepción, in which, quite frankly, the ESAF inflicted fairly sizable numbers of casualties on the guerrillas, but those were guerrilla-initiated exercises on a fairly large scale. You could see a swing, in terms of initiative, from the ESAF to the guerrillas.

In the one [attack], up around Osicala, the report was 500 or 400 insurgents, but it was probably a couple hundred, but

they were young, and there were some women. They were well armed, with an awful lot of ammunition. That was one of the comments that came through from everybody. They just had an awful lot of ammunition to shoot up. Much more than we are used to seeing. That business of following the earthquake with a unilateral truce or cease-fire—the insurgents backed off, went away, rearmed, re-equipped, and here they are coming out of the chute fresh.



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## *Changes in Guerrilla Strategy and Tactics*

THE EDITORS—The strategic concepts of prolonged war as applied to the situation in El Salvador seem to be understood by the El Salvadoran and American military leadership. Yet the understanding may not be complete. There is both a rhetorical display of an understanding of prolonged war strategy and tactics and an implied manifestation of using semiconventional forces to win militarily in the short term. The countercomments indicate that, while the quantity of the insurgents has decreased, the quality and strategy of the insurgents have increased. The capability of the insurgents to wage combined large scale military actions has decreased, but the ability of the insurgents to wage a long-term multidimensional war may have increased. The rhetorical understanding of what is meant by prolonged war does not appear to be matched with an equally strong operational understanding of what it will take to defeat an insurgent dedicated to a prolonged war.

## ***Diminished International Support and Guerrilla Strategy***

**Miguel Castellanos**—International solidarity has diminished somewhat with respect to the economic aid that comes from the solidarity committees in each country and from humanitarian institutions. That was discussed during a meeting of the Central Committee in February 1985. It was declared that in 1984, the FMLN income did not reach the one million dollar mark . . . and their only hopes depended on the economic support received from oil countries such as Iran and Libya; which had already provided a part of that support.

We have observed what has been going on in countries that traditionally practice solidarity—Nicaragua, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Vietnam—and I think it is important to point out a significant decrease in the diplomatic support of some countries and international organizations. In Central America, for example, due to the hard line of pro-imperialism of the Government, Costa Rica has ceased to be the focal point from which guerrillas received support and were able to practice their political activities; not to mention Guatemala and Honduras. In this sense, the United States continues to serve as a focal point for the largest political activity (after Nicaragua).

The diplomatic approach, considered by the FMLN to be extremely vital for a revolutionary victory has considerably weakened. The strongest support they counted on came from the French and Mexicans, and that has weakened considerably because both countries have renewed their relations with the Government of El Salvador. The Central Committee concluded that, "The Government has come back from being in a state of international isolation." In Europe, countries like Spain, France, Sweden, and Holland support the FMLN and provide

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987. As quoted in *Conversaciones con el Comandante Miguel Castellanos*, edited by Javier Rojas P. (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), pp. 151-152. Copyright 1986 by Editorial Andante. Reprinted by permission of Editorial Andante.



their solidarity. Contadora is considered a good example for a politically negotiated solution ... besides, Contadora is very positive for the FMLN because it realizes that it could prevent any intervention of U.S. military forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

## *Guerrilla Strategy and Tactics*

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—Normally we should point out the fact that from the strategic perspective the Left is very experienced. They have been very successful in many instances. One example of the strategy they use is fragmentation, atomization. Between 10 and 15 groups are created, and maybe it is just a name, and maybe they are the same people in that specific location, but they always give the impression of strength. Later on they appear together giving the impression of being a great mass, a large organization. They use this strategy quite frequently. They use it also with the popular front system and align themselves with all of the forces. But they always wind up controlling all of the forces. That's exactly what happened in Nicaragua when the FAO, Frente Amplio de Oposición [Wide Opposition Front], was established and where the Sandinistas, the private sector, the church, political parties, social, and labor sectors were integrated. And in the end, who retained control? The Sandinistas and the Marxists retained the power and control. The same approach was taken by Mao Tse-tung in China.

That is what is called the popular front. We had here at one time the popular forum and the FDR-FMLN front. The FDR pretends to be a popular front, but it hasn't been able to capture the necessary support from other organizations. It never had the capability to do that; however, it did create "phantom" organizations. They had six, seven, or eight organizations characterized by their humanitarian approach. Among them

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

were the Midwives, the Political Prisoner's Association, the Marianela García Villa Association, the Governmental Human Rights Committee, the Juridical Succor of the Archbishopric, etc. They also had the MIPTES, Movimiento Independiente de Profesionales y Técnicos [Independent Professionals and Technicians Movement], but this was a small group that belonged to the FDR. Then you had the Christian Social Movement, which I believe were five to six people. The MNR must have 10 or 15 people. The point is that they always give the appearance of having large masses of people, of having multiple organizations that at any given moment they get together and give this impression. Their strategy, of course, is to never admit that they are Marxists. They declare that they are not Marxists, and their main objective is to fight for freedom, social justice, for peace, and for the poor.

Then, anyone is susceptible to those declarations. They stop to think, "Hey, these are good objectives, I'm going to join one of these organizations." But they never admit that they are struggling to establish Marxism in El Salvador. Then, these groups always look for great objectives that are convincing, sympathizing, that strike curiosity, that arouse sympathy within the population focusing on the struggle for peace. Then you ask yourself, "Who doesn't want to fight for peace?" But it is their peace, the Marxist peace. It is a peace where one million people are expelled, where they have 50,000 prisoners in jails—that is the Marxist's peace. It is totally different. They tend to manipulate the terms rather intelligently and speak in favor of democracy, but it is their democracy, the Marxist's democracy. They condemn imperialism quite frequently, but they never refer to Russian imperialism, it's always in reference to the North American imperialism. They talk about solidarity, that the people should be free, that they should be able to have self-determination. This self-determination suggests that there should be no American interference, but there can be Russian interference and Cuban interference. Then you have student movements and labor movements which speak in favor of vindicating workers' rights. Who doesn't want to vindicate workers' rights? You have a lot of people joining these

organizations who are so confused that they think they are truly struggling to fulfill these objectives. But what they don't realize is that they are struggling to accomplish these goals from an ideological standpoint, from a strictly political Marxist point of view.

There are several connotations to this strategy, not only with respect to the organizations, but also with respect to terminology, objectives, the way they run things. For example, they are always willing to align themselves with anyone. Presently, we have a labor union that was "once the BPR, Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero, the FAPU. They are now consolidated under a single organization" known as the UNTS, Union Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños [National Union for Salvadoran Workers]. They have never come forward and acknowledged any alliance with the Marxists, but they are always attacking the government and the United States. They claim that Salvador's problem is due to U.S. intervention, but there has never been any reference made to either Nicaraguan or Cuban intervention. There is a very defined political strategy here. When one of these organizations disintegrates they always seem to have the capability to establish a new one with new programs, new leaders, new faces, but in the end it is always geared to the same goals, objectives.

We have talked about military strategy before. Their military strategy consists of creating groups, increasing their size, and striking heavy blows against the government. The insurgents believe that the best training a combatant can receive is to actively participate in activities. This is in effect what really happens. We also know for a fact that these groups kidnapped people, held them hostage for 15 days while attempting to inculcate their beliefs and indoctrinate them as to the reason they're fighting, what are their objectives. They do not tell their hostages, "We are Marxists." Rather they convince them [the hostages] that they are fighting for the people, to preserve their land, to improve their standard of living, and to provide education for their children. That hostage, then, starts to see things in a different perspective; the objectives become more clear to him. But, when the 15 days are

up the organization provides him with an unloaded weapon and takes him to the battlefield to participate in a military activity. He participates in a skirmish and then retreats. At the time of withdrawal they remind him that he is already a part of the organization, and if he retreats they will lay the blame on him, and if there were any casualties he was responsible for them. That is how they incorporate people into their groups. Fortunately, we've been very successful with respect to the psychological part of the war. Many people have withdrawn from their forces, and I think that is why they've taken so many reprisals lately. Their troops have decreased in size, which has created a lot of confusion and chaos and lack of courage to continue fighting.

As we have progressed and improved our image, militarily their image has worsened, and they have given no indication as to when they want to win this war. I want to win this war, but I don't want to grow old fighting it, and I certainly don't want my children to continue fighting it. I'm not interested in that type of war.

In the tactical sense the terrorist forces began operating as small independent groups. They established certain communication mechanisms and later began assaulting banks, killing policemen on the streets, assaulting relief trucks, and while they would continue to develop this attitude they would increment their forces, increment their troops. There have been many people who have been incorporated into these activities simply because of a salary, without any ideological motivation. This is how they pursue their tactical approach. They proceed to destroy bridges, blow up electrical posts, and, believe it or not, these types of activities strengthen them ideologically. The sense of danger, persecution, defiance, arouses a feeling of accomplishment, that they have performed an illicit action against the government and the whole structure of the state. That is a strong enough motivation for them. Once they have mastered the ability to operate at these lower levels, they begin thinking of plotting and attacking on a grander scale, such as attacking several towns and small military installations.

We talked about the three phases of a prolonged war. At a given moment their strategic defensive attitudes lead them to

search for an offensive position, besides being morally uplifting. But when they manage to establish their own camp sites and when they are able to remain for a week or two weeks at these sites, receiving training and proper military instruction, their forces strengthen considerably, and at the same time their political role as well. That is, when they occupy a certain area they fulfill a military role in controlling the site and a political role in trying to indoctrinate the people at that specific location. All *campesinos*, women, and children are summoned to special classes that are held day and night in order to explain to them their purpose for fighting and generate feelings of aggression against the government and sympathy and thankfulness towards the guerrillas because the people believe they are fighting to save them. If someone approaches me and tells me that I will be able to own land and that he is fighting to provide me this land, my first reaction to this will be—of course be—that this guy's a hero. Then, as they increase their forces politically and militarily they are able to strike heavier blows against the government. The ideal solution would be for them to control the areas.

At this point our mission is to prevent these forces from remaining in one place for too long and continuing to indoctrinate and incorporate these people into their ideological movement. Their principal targets are roads, installations, a central authority such as the Mayor's Jurisdiction, communications offices such as the local command groups, the National Guard, and the National Police. These sites become their main targets for destruction because they represent the central authority. By removing this central authority they are able to establish what they call a local authority—a popular government. At the same time, by controlling a designated area and its people the guerrillas are able to use them as informants and find out what the armed forces are doing. As a result of this the guerrillas can anticipate the armed forces' next move and evacuate the area. Back in '83 and '84 they confronted our forces openly and with regular units just like ours. But ever since they've been constantly on the run without offering any resistance.

It has not been to our advantage during moments of worst danger that the subversive forces have attempted a zero-level

economy. They are attempting to reduce our economy to zero. The guerrillas know that if factories shut down and are not able to pay their employees and if the armed forces are unable to pay their soldiers, they will inevitably win this war. Therefore, their next approach is to destroy everything that represents the state's infrastructure—tearing down bridges, destroying electrical towers, destroying telephone booths, attacking trains—and consequently create a general feeling of insecurity among the people. Unfortunately, there comes a time when our people feel so desperate that they are willing to accept anything. If you are suddenly approached and offered security and peace with the conditions of a Marxist government being established, you would most likely accede to allowing this because all you care about is having peace. This is what we are trying to avoid. This type of war cannot be prolonged indefinitely because the people become exhausted. They begin to doubt the state's capacity to deal with the situation at hand and furthermore, the state's capacity to deal with its armed forces. We must make an effort to control and better safeguard the economic conditions, production, and stability of this country.

### ***Insurgents Revert Back to "Creole" War***

**General Juan Rafael Bustillo**—The guerrillas made several mistakes that changed the course of the war. First, they grew in such large numbers that they considered themselves stronger than they actually were. The second mistake was a result of the tremendous support in human personnel they were receiving from Cuba and Nicaragua. No, let me rephrase that, because of Fidel Castro and the Sandinistas. I don't want to give the impression that I'm condemning these two countries because of their political leaders. Then, the guerrillas' increase in size and the tremendous military support they had made them think that they were capable of confronting our armed forces. Those were

General Juan Bustillo, Chief of Salvadoran Air Force, 1979 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 January 1987.

very big mistakes on their part, and after a whole year of having one failure after another they were determined to resort back to their "Creole" [prolonged people's] type war.

## ***Operational Modes We Will Use***

***Captured FMLN Document***—Our strategy to confront the enemy operations and patrols:

Countering this is our fundamental problem. That is to say that our combat now will be against troops in movement. Enemy patrols are trying to impede us from massing forces to hit other targets. In other words, the enemy seeks to hit with concentrated mass our forces, trying to disorganize and wear them down. If we convert the enemy patrols to our most important tactical objective, we then seize the initiative and the offensive against that strategy. To face the enemy strategy, we must implement the following elements:

- a. Small units (platoons and squadrons) whose main mission is to cause casualties and withdraw in echelon, using sharpshooters and explosives. These units will have the capacity to penetrate to the rear of the enemy advance, taking advantage of their mobility, their knowledge of the land and popular support.
- b. Attempt to strike the troops as soon as they approach the zone in trucks until they withdraw, always in small units.
- c. High mobility of the command and units with constant coordination to assure persistent attack.
- d. Agility of movement and the reduction of all noncombat elements, the optimum being that the entire structure be organized into guerrilla units.

From "Concerning Our Military Plans: The Military Strategy of the FMLN" (a document captured and transcribed by the Atlacatl Battalion, near Perquín, El Salvador, date unknown, probably late 1983), in *The Comandantes Speak: The Military Strategy of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front*, translated and edited by Gabriel and Judith F. Marcella, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College, March 1987, pp. 2-7; 19-22.

- e. Retain the possibility of concentrating guerrilla platoons and those of the mobile force in order to undertake ambushes for annihilation and for requisition (sic), when the topography and enemy behavior permit.
- f. We will avoid using massed force in conventional lines of fire.

We must understand that at this moment the most important thing is to subject the Army to a profound attrition of its forces. Constant operational casualties will provoke a process of weakening the enemy which will create the conditions to execute large scale operations. Casualties are the main cause of desertion and demoralization.

Sabotage and destabilization of vital areas. This constitutes the other fundamental element of our strategic plan. The enemy plan is to take us out of the vital zones of the Southeast in order to reactivate the economy. Our presence and our activities in these zones is having strategic, economic, political, and military repercussions. Productive economic activity in the whole the Eastern region is in a very difficult situation and we must make it worse so that we forestall enemy plans.

Great sections of highways, railroads, plus strategic and secondary lines are within our reach and the enemy can do nothing to impede us. The East is the center of the strategic plan of reactivation; if we manage to prevent it from starting, many millions of dollars will be lost, frustrating imperialism's plans of assistance. We must work systematically in the following areas:

- a. Fuel (pipelines)
- b. Electricity
- c. Railroads
- d. Telephonic communications (lines and microwave)
- e. Cotton and coffee

All of these extremely weak points in the East, attacking them constantly on a grand scale will provoke situations which will have strategic repercussions even in the political propaganda area. The two transport stoppages which we've achieved in the East have brought news of international



repercussion which have tarnished the image of the dictatorship, causing loss of confidence in Duarte's ideas. The stoppages in the East and the seizure of Cerron [Grande] Dam are actions of the greatest impact for the FMLN. This gives us an idea of the importance of destabilization. Our campaign of sabotaging the cotton also has great economic, political, and propaganda impact.

The destabilization will increase our political authority over the entire region which will place the Army in an increasingly difficult situation since it will lose control. This will cause frustration, desertion, rejection of the enemy's recruitment, etc., in other words the weakening of his human reserves.

*Ambush:* The territory that we have conquered until now opens up great possibilities for us to move to undertake annihilation and requisition ambushes. We have within reach many highways and roads where the enemy moves in vehicles.

We must work to learn how to conduct ambushes as we maintain secrecy and cover. In this task political work among the population and the use of minimum force play a basic role.

We must realize that ambushing allows the annihilation of superior units without having to use much force, since we already have the advantage of surprise and terrain, in addition to the fact that massed troops moving in trucks are extremely vulnerable.

Ambushes will allow us to conduct operations to requisition arms and munitions, with the guarantee that we will not lose manpower. We need to plan the ambushes in great detail, assigning specific missions for annihilation, for assault, for requisitioning, for containment, for the use of machine guns, explosives, and other support fire.

If we learn to conduct ambushes we will begin to supply ourselves with logistic means in large numbers.

*Selective strikes:* We will use the other mode against fixed enemy positions. Our actions will be attacks against the most isolated towns of the enemy, using explosives to annihilate them quickly. These operations will also allow us to recover arms and ammunition. The idea is to partially strike the enemy dispositions; we are not in these cases interested in occupying

the position; the important thing is to cause casualties and recover arms when possible.

To sum up, we can say that we will seek contact and rapid annihilation in every mode of combat. This will help us prevent the enemy from massing his force and applying air support. We will apply the principle of massing our superior forces in maneuver warfare until we have seriously weakened the enemy.

## ***The Principal Organizations and Their Activities***

**Colonel James J. Steele**—The FMLN organization goes back to the beginning of this insurgency when Fidel Castro got representatives of all the five groups together and basically told them that the price of his support was unification. They would have to set their differences aside and work together, if he was going to provide them with help. They've attempted to do that, and I've seen, even in my two and a half years, an almost cyclical, repetitive effort to try to unify the factions to a greater extent. But, it's always fallen apart. For a while the guerrillas were trying to paint themselves as FMLN. They weren't FPL any longer or ERP or FAL. They were all part of one organization, the FMLN. News people and others who would run into guerrillas would ask which faction they were from, and the guerrillas would tell them, "Well, we're FMLN now." But, that hasn't really stuck.

So, now we're back to the factions. I'm not sure which is good and which is bad, quite frankly. It's good that they're divided, but an allegiance to those factions is like an allegiance to a regiment or to a battalion. It plays an important role in terms of morale, attitudes, and so on which can't be discounted. There is a major difference in philosophy between some of the groups. The ERP is a more militant group, and the focus has always been very military. A military victory, fairly quick, á la

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

Nicaragua, has been their strategy. But, then they had to take a step back, and they had to start talking about small unit operations, protracted conflict: "Wait the Gringos out! Even if it takes 10 years." That's a tough pill, and it's a particularly tough pill for elements like the ERP.

The ERP approach, you can call it FOCO, you can call it Ché Guevara—but it is essentially an insurgent strategy that is focused on military operations and military success. That's not to say they don't recognize the political implications, but it's designed to do things relatively quickly. Contrast that with the FPL, which is the major faction in the central part of the country. They are more of a Maoist type faction. They think more in political terms, developing infrastructure—developing the sea so that the fish can swim. So the FPL is, by far, the more dangerous group, even though it may be smaller than the ERP, because they recognize what this war is about. The ERP's strategy worked very well when you were looking at overwhelming your opponent, but when you start talking protracted conflict, they haven't adjusted well to that. They don't handle propaganda well. They don't develop political infrastructure very well.

I was in Perquín two or three weeks ago, and I talked to a teacher. Perquín is a case where more people have returned, and there's a school functioning. But it's still one of those towns where the Army's got it one month, and the guerrillas have it the next month, just by virtue of the fact that the military doesn't maintain continuing presence there. And, even when the military's not there, you find that, according to the people (and I believe them), the guerrillas have made very little effort to try to affect what's being taught in the schools. Again, the focus is military.

If you go up into Chalatenango, and places like Aguilaes, you see a striking contrast. There, the guerrillas make an effort to develop popular committees, even if they're little towns. There's a major effort to build a political base or a base they can maintain in a protracted conflict. That's a major difference. There's a repopulation effort going on in the country. Some of it driven by the government, some of it driven by the guerrillas.

They're trying to bring people into areas where they think they have influence, bringing them out of Mesa Grande, for example, putting them into places like Aquilares. So, there is a contest for the allegiance of the people.

But, what we had seen—if you want to talk in terms of their changing strategy, particularly by the FPL—has a focus on trying to develop a support base in the countryside, particularly in the areas that it's difficult for the government to control. The FPL has been at the center of that effort.

The number of guerrillas is subject to some question. But, my estimate of the number of guerrillas in the countryside now—when I say guerrillas, I'm talking about armed insurgents—is probably about 5,000. Let me say, however, that there are differences of opinion as to how many guerrillas there are. I'm not certain where the answer is, but I feel fairly comfortable with the number of about 5,000. Now, those are armed combatants. There is another category that can't be excluded, and that's a category that we would term *masas*. *Masas* are defined as people who are actively supporting the guerrillas. You could consider some of these people, perhaps, as militia that could be mobilized to carry arms in the case of a major mobilization by the guerrillas. Their numbers are really loose, but again you're talking in terms of, perhaps 20,000 or 30,000.

Let's say there are 5,000 armed combatants out there now, where a couple of years ago we were talking 10,000. Okay, that's success. That's a measure of effectiveness. But 5,000 guerrillas can cause you a lot of trouble. Even if you get the number down to 1,000, they can cause you problems. You go back to Uruguay and look at the Topamaros there. I don't think that there were probably ever more than a few hundred of those guys, but they kept that government tied up in knots for years. So, numbers are important, but keep in mind that even limited numbers can cause problems.

Although the guerrillas are getting weaker, I don't want to take too much away from them, because I think what we're seeing in El Salvador today are some of the best guerrillas, probably *the* best guerrillas, we've seen in this hemisphere to

date. They are certainly better than anything we saw in Nicaragua or in Cuba, but their numbers are smaller, their support base has deteriorated, and they've had to adjust. For example, the two major factions, the FPL and the ERP, both have what they call "FEZ" or special forces units. The ERP has incorporated those units into its war-fighting strategy to a greater extent than the FPL has. In fact, if you look at the major engagements that have occurred in the ERP's area of control: the attack that was mounted at the CEMFA [Centro de Entrenamiento Militar de la Fuerza Armada (Armed Force Military Training Center)] in the fall of 1985, then the San Miguel attack earlier this year, they were both conducted by the same organization—the special forces units of the ERP.

Those attacks were almost carbon copies of one another, operationally speaking. The level of training of the units of the special forces—it numbers probably 75, or perhaps as many as 100, but no more—is very good. There is a heavy emphasis on sapper techniques, infiltrating, and achieving surprise and so on. In both cases, they experienced some success. They killed a lot of people, and they did considerable damage to buildings through the use of explosives. But, in both of those attacks, they paid a very heavy cost. In fact, you could almost see the time it took to put the unit back together after the attack on CEMFA, because the number of guerrilla bodies left on the battlefield was considerable. We're talking about those that were found. They don't normally like to leave people behind.

The attack at San Miguel was the same kind of thing but with even heavier casualties. They were heavily armed, with a lot of demolitions. If you consider the size of the unit that made the attack, it was a pretty significant percentage to have been killed. If you consider wounded that were able to escape and so on, it wouldn't surprise me to find that casualty figures for that unit probably approached 50 percent in those attacks. It was possibly even greater, who knows? But, again, the mission never was one of trying to really take over those installations but instead to get in there, cause havoc, and kill as many people as they could.

In the case of the CEMFA, the mission was to kill Americans, then to try to get out before reinforcements and

reorganization could take place. The FPL has tended not to use those kinds of units. It appears to focus more on trying to put together regular guerrilla forces to conduct an attack. It's been a disaster every time they have done it since they broke down into small units.

I can recall back in the summer of 1984, when they hit the dam at Cerrón Grande. Only part of the operation, from their point of view, was highly successful. I went down and I looked at the ground. They killed a lot of soldiers, but they never took the dam itself. You could almost draw a line on the ground between where one unit was to stop and another unit was to pick up responsibility. There was an attack from the north and an attack from the south. The attack from the south was very successful. It overran a barracks, a *comandancia* [command post], and a small sub-station. Then, they stopped! The attack from the north got screwed up and was never able to take the main powerhouse/dam complex. That illustrates the kinds of problems that you have from a command and control point of view when you're no longer operating in large units. They were trying to pull dispersed units together and conduct an operation. Guerrilla operations must be characterized by detailed planning, rehearsals, surprise, and so on. If they don't have that, they are at a severe disadvantage. It's difficult to do some of those things when you're trying to pull people together when they're dispersed.

A similar case in point was an attack on Suchitoto in November of 1984. The attack was originally planned to occur just prior to the U.S. elections in order to have an impact on them. Again, because of what I would argue are problems of command and control associated with their dispersed strategy, they weren't able to pull it off until about two weeks after the elections. The attack was in some respects a fiasco. This is based on reports from defectors later, who had participated. One of the guerrilla factions, a major faction out of the FPL as a matter of fact, didn't get to the right place at the right time. This was perhaps the largest attack in the last couple of years here, involving about a thousand guerrillas, not all of them actually focused on the town, some focused on protecting the egress

routes back to their base areas and also ambushing the road coming into Suchitoto which they anticipated reinforcements would use. But, there was still a heavy number of people focused on attacking the town itself. They started the attack piecemeal because one unit wasn't in place. The thing got stalled. The result was that about 180 policemen and some civil defense men held the attack off until first light when the Airborne showed up with helicopters. The attack was pretty much a fiasco. So, these are the kinds of problems that exist when they're trying to do it that way.

A more recent example, Nueva Concepción, which occurred about a week ago, as a matter of fact [the first week in October, 1986], was another example of what appears to have been a very large-scale attack. When I spoke to them, the people in the town indicated that they thought the number of guerrillas was about 1,500. Now, I'm sure that that's an exaggerated figure, but I'm also sure that it was a major attack. It was perhaps the largest attack that we have seen in terms of guerrilla numbers this year. It was certainly bigger than what we saw at San Miguel. My guess is perhaps 200 to 300 guerrillas, maybe more, participated in the attack, again attacking a hacienda police unit of some 55 to 60 policemen, augmented with a civil defense unit. Again, in this case because of good intelligence and a good effort on the part of the defenders, a guerrilla attack—which was characterized by very detailed planning, use of indirect fire, and so on—turned out to be a fiasco for them. In one case where the guerrillas focused on one of the defenders' emplacements, the defenders pulled back, and the guerrillas moved into it, at the same time that their indirect fire was starting to fall. So, it fell right on top of them. The guerrillas sustained some pretty significant losses there. (The people showed up for the attack in one case in a bus that they had stolen and about eight or nine different vehicles from one direction, several other vehicles from another direction, and on foot from another.) The accounts of the guerrilla casualties that were seen as they were trying to pull out were numerous. Again, these are the kinds of spectacular shows for people, to make them think that you still represent a significant military threat.

## ***Objectives and Tactics***

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—The guerrillas, as they were less and less successful in their direct confrontation with the Salvadoran military forces, began to look more and more for what I call the “cheap target.” These are road interdiction operations where they stop civilian traffic on the road, sometimes shooting up the vehicles. They shoot the vehicles up if they don’t stop. If they kill anybody—men, women, children—it doesn’t matter. If the vehicle doesn’t stop they shoot. Sometimes they burn vehicles, destroy them. Sometimes they just collect taxes. Throughout the country, they will declare a traffic stoppage for a period of two weeks or so. Then they pop up here and there and set up road blocks to stop all the traffic, lecture people, and collect war taxes and this sort of thing. That’s one type of target.

The other target is the power grid system. They dynamite down, or use some type of explosive to blow down, metal power poles. They pay farmers to cut or chop down the wooden poles that have replaced the steel power poles. I forget what sum they offer a farmer to do this, but it’s something on the order of \$50 a pole or something like that. Then the farmer goes out there in the middle of the night with an ax or saw, chops the pole down, and collects his money.

There are many, many different ways to attack the infrastructure. They were kidnapping mayors; they were destroying public records; kidnapping youngsters—for a while the guerrillas had a program of forced recruitment, which they admitted themselves didn’t work very well. They were going after soft targets—targets for maximum propaganda impact, maximum economic impact, maximum disruptive effect upon the security and stability of an area, with a minimal amount of risk to themselves. Conservatism, low risk, minimization of casualties, careful expenditure of resources. These are guerrilla tenets. The scenario could have been written by Clausewitz.

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.



Those are the standard guerrilla operations. They almost consistently avoid actual contact with the armed forces—unless it's upon a target of their choice at a time of their choosing—when they have the time to do all the careful planning and preparation necessary for such attacks. Occasionally, there would be random confrontations of company- or battalion-size forces in the countryside. Sometimes the Army came out ahead, but just as frequently the guerrillas did.

They'll pick out an objective. That objective may be a community, an entire town, or it may be a hydro-electric facility, or it may be a communications site. But, essentially, their planning for the assault upon such a facility is the same, whether it's in the countryside or in the city. The planning begins months ahead of time, with very careful training, preparation, rehearsals, and so forth for the attack—the planned assault phase, the planned exploitation phase, and the planned withdrawal phase. And, they are prepared to abort the operation at any stage if they feel that the operation has been compromised or if something is not going according to their plans. This is a standard guerrilla procedure and reflects their conservation and sensitivity to avoid needless casualties.

There aren't really that many urban areas. You've got the capital city of San Salvador. You've got San Miguel in the east and Santa Ana in the west. You've got a few other areas like San Vicente in the central portion of the country between San Salvador and San Miguel that can be categorized as urban areas. I think that, aside from a major attack on a military installation within one of these cities—which would almost surely be unsuccessful for the guerrillas\*—their tactics, again, are to employ booby traps or assassination attempts or kidnapping mayors or destroying or burning town halls, destroying public records. In other words, they're attacks aimed at either the economic infrastructure or at the social infrastructure, if you will, and don't necessarily have military targets specifically.

\*I have since been proven wrong—when the guerrillas a month or so ago penetrated the 3rd Brigade *cuartel* in San Miguel and inflicted substantial casualties [The date of this statement is 30 July 1986—Eds.].

These types of activities, of course, fade rapidly into acts of terrorism and assassination. From their perspective, they, of course, do not consider killing military officers assassination. We call it assassination; it's just part of business as usual for them. For that matter, and quite legitimately so, if they can find some guy who leaves himself open to be shot in the middle of the city, he's fair game there, just as if he were out in the countryside. No matter how much of an issue you want to make of it, from their perspective that guy is a fair target. So yes, they do assassinate or kill people in the cities if they can identify a target. But again, these things are carefully planned. Weeks and probably months go into the planning of an assassination attempt, of a hit on a guy. Months of planning go into major attacks on economic targets or military targets. For a major attack on a target in an urban or a rural area, they will draw upon forces from different guerrilla organizations from all over the country. It takes a week or two for them to collect and gather and finally mass at about two o'clock in the morning for their assault.

### ***The Evolution of Guerrilla Strategy and Tactics since 1980***

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—When the military struggle and the explosion of violence began in 1980, the insurgents launched themselves into a military adventure. I will give you a brief summary of the evolution of this war since then. In 1980, the FMLN and FDR were founded. The FMLN is the military structured organization. The FDR is the political diplomatic front. They declared that their principal objective—to establish Marxism and communism—could only be attained by defeating the armed forces. Other forces, such as the political parties, the church, the educational system, the productive sector, and the labor sector, were all divided and heavily infiltrated and did not

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

represent obstacles for the insurgents to be able to take power. The only problem they foresaw was the armed forces. Their goal was to defeat us by what they referred to as the insurrectional method, that is, to seek a military defeat through military actions, armed groups, and support of the *masas*. They would call for an uprising of the political army of the *masas*. Once the armed forces were defeated and the former regime overthrown, a Socialist government would be instituted. This new government would speak in favor of a proletariat dictatorship and a government based on popular representation.

In 1980, we had 13,000 men against 10,000-12,000 guerrilla troops, in addition to 60,000-70,000 people supporting them. Demonstrations were performed on a daily basis. They would inundate the capital and occupy the church, the Plaza de la Libertad, and the university. Their growing confidence led them to believe they were strong enough to launch a successful attack and defeat the armed forces—thus, the final offensive on 10 January 1981. This proved to be an exact scheme of what occurred in Nicaragua. First, there would be a wearing down of the military groups and their garrisons in order to create a sense of demoralization. The people would then realize that the armed forces was neither capable of defending itself nor counteracting the massive attacks they were experiencing. Then, the first phase was the process of wearing down. The next phase was a call for a general strike of all public and private employees to sabotage or impede a normal development of commercial and bureaucratic activity. The final phase included the attacks against the centers of power—the *cuarteles*, the Assembly and the presidential house. This would inevitably lead to a military defeat. That is what occurred in Nicaragua and that is what they intended to do here.

The first insurrectional attempt was in 1981. It wore us down a lot, but they also suffered heavy losses. The offensive was a complete failure. On the first day we successfully counteracted the military offensive and drove the enemy away

from the population centers all the way back to the mountains. We began pursuing them. Neither the general strike nor the attack against the centers of power was successfully executed. The outcome of these attacks was a phase I referred to as a development of their military forces. The insurgents realized that they were not capable of confronting our garrisons. In order to bring together all of their popular forces—students, workers, *campesinos*—they needed to increase their size. They blamed their defeat on the lack of military equipment, and as a result, they withdrew their forces and began to strengthen themselves militarily.

There was such a tremendous increase in supplies and massive recruitments that by 1982, 12,000 men composed the insurgent forces. The guerrilla movement originated in the cities—the urban guerrilla. When they transferred their forces to the fields, the change became noticeable, as taught by Mao. In 1982, they launched themselves into another military adventure by attempting to boycott the elections. On March 28, we were celebrating the election of a Constitutional Assembly, as the beginning of the democratization process in this country. It was not beneficial for the subversives to allow the people to cast their ballots during the election in 1982. The insurgents' assault against the armed forces was much stronger than the one back in 1981. They claimed they had total support from the *masas* and peripheral areas like Mexicanos, Cuscatanzingo, San Marcos, and Soyapango. But it turned out to be an even bigger failure because the subversives didn't want elections. They declared that the elections were a joke.

The armed forces demanded a response from the people as to their choice between communism or democracy. Our people are traditionally and authentically democratic. We respect the religious values left behind by the Spaniards. We faithfully practice the Christian beliefs, and we cannot commune with communism. We are true lovers of liberty. Despite the various attempts to indoctrinate our people in the schools and universities, the subversives were unsuccessful in instituting

communism in this country. The people don't want to practice this ideology. Therefore, it was never desired by the subversives to allow the people to vote in 1982, thus, the choice between boycotting the elections or a March 28 offensive. The attack was more violent, but we once again managed to counteract it in 24 hours.

In my opinion, the attempt to boycott the elections was a strategic objective. They realized the people did not want communism. The Assembly was elected. A provisional president was appointed, and the political parties were united. This was a very important step for us because it meant the establishment of a legitimate government through an electoral process.

I think, at this point, the greatest problem the subversion faces is the inability to indoctrinate the people of El Salvador. Internally, our people are convinced that the FMLN is a Communist-Marxist organization supported by Russia, Cuba, and Nicaragua. The subversives' biggest error was having identified themselves with this ideology and having tried to establish their doctrine in this country. The people do not want to accept communism. In order to strengthen their political and military positions, the subversives will have to increase their recruitment capability, and that is going to be very difficult, due to the nature of their clandestinity. It has become increasingly difficult for them to obtain internal and external support. The channels through which the logistics supplies are provided are difficult to access and, therefore, impossible to transfer arms. For example, a network of logistic support originates in Vietnam. It is then transferred to Cuba and from Cuba to Nicaragua. In spite of having these channels carefully studied and analyzed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to use them. Another weakness, I think, is the problem of leadership or *caciquismo* between the five guerrilla groups—FPL, FAL, FARN, ERP, and PRTC. They have never achieved and never will achieve a total unity of command. That is an internal weakness caused by their struggle for power.

## ***The Primary Objective Remains the Same***

**Joaquín Villalobos**—Given all of this, if imperialism stubbornly insists on impeding our people from building their own destiny, we are sure that it will suffer a deeper defeat than in Vietnam, since nothing can stop us from winning our freedom. Our people and their vanguard are determined to win and WE WILL WIN.

Joaquin Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), p. 105. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

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## *October-November 1984 Peace Talks*

### *Negotiations as a Form of Insurgent Conflict*

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—We must always bear in mind that we are confronted by the Marxists, and the Marxists have their own moral standards. They are different morals. They are their own morals. They are neither your morals nor mine. They are not the morals of a good man. They are not the morals of the church. They are not the ethics by which we base our studies and, a lot of times, our own professional institutions. The Marxist moral states that one must utilize whatever the means in order to achieve power. It somewhat reflects the morals of Machiavelli. What is important are the objectives. What is important is the power, and then, it doesn't matter what mechanisms are used in order to achieve this power. As a result, the use of negotiations and dialogue is just another mechanism of war. It is just another instrument of the conflict.

Another dimension. This is the dimension they refer to a lot. It is also related to the people's front. The people's front pursues to group the forces of the opposition. In addition to

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

certain objectives such as national independence, expulsion from the government, and peace—objectives we are in agreement with. We want peace. We truly want prosperity for our people. We want to improve the conditions for our people. Those are objectives and feelings in which we all coincide. Then, they exploit those feelings. They manage to group certain sectors in order to incorporate them in the struggle and utilize them as mechanisms of support in order to advance and consolidate a front or force even stronger and more powerful. During the dialogue, they utilized precisely the mechanism of peace. They say, "Well, El Salvador wants peace. The Salvadorans want peace . . .," and we are willing to work to achieve that peace. "... But in order for us to achieve that peace, you must permit us to constitute 50 percent of the government. You must permit us to maintain an armed force in the mountains. You must permit us to work openly through the means of communication that are already existent, such as indoctrination." That is to say, that is no more or no less than a long-term suicide. It is like taking poison everyday, a little bit at a time, and at the end of a year, maybe two or three years, we will be totally wiped out.

The Nicaraguans did it. They created what is called the FAO, Frente Amplio de Oposición [Wide Opposition Front], in which they managed to group all the sectors, including the capitalist sectors who opposed Somoza. And there they were. The democratic sectors such as Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Chamorro, who represented *la Prensa* [the press] and who represented practically the entire national opinion of the press against Somoza, were grouped. And what happened later on? "To one side! People, you are no longer useful to us because our goal is not this. Our goal is this. Therefore, out of our way because we are going to fulfill our tasks." And that is precisely what they have planned for the negotiations. That is why we can't accept a negotiation in which the integration of the government or the integration of the armed forces can be questioned. Because those are precisely the principal mechanisms of defense of democracy. Also, we cannot question or permit that they restrict the liberties that are offered by



democracy because they can be in the political field, but at the same time, they can be in the military fields up in the mountains. They must make a decision. Either they are here or they are over there. But they can't be in both places.

### ***The International Environment***

**Dr. José Z. García**—El Salvador depends only to a certain extent on the legitimacy of the government and the vagaries of domestic politics. In a civil war funded to a large extent from abroad, the international climate is just as important.

If there is a single cause for the rebel decision to move toward a negotiated settlement, it lies in the changing international context affecting both the government and the rebels. Just as the government has depended on United States assistance, the rebels have relied on political, financial, and military support from abroad—and on the withholding of support to the government. In both respects, the rebels appear to have lost ground. Duarte succeeded in increasing military and economic assistance, not only from the United States, but, in some ways more important from the standpoint of the rebels, from several other countries as well.

In July, West Germany agreed to release to El Salvador \$18 million it had pledged several years ago but had subsequently suspended because of pressures from rebel sympathizers. Mexico restored full diplomatic representation to San Salvador after four years of relative neutrality. The European Economic Community (EEC) pledged renewed assistance at the meeting of European and Central American Foreign Ministers in Costa Rica in September 1984. In August, Britain resumed assistance after a five-year break. United Nations agencies will probably increase their assistance as well. Thus, the international ostracism of the Salvadoran government appears to have ended, because of perceptions that Duarte is the

Dr. José Z. García provided his analysis of the situation in "El Salvador: Legitimizing the Government," *Current History* 84, no. 500 (March 1985), pp. 101-104; 135-36. Copyright 1985 by Current History, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Current History, Inc.

head of a legitimate government, likely to survive after two rounds of elections, and because of improvements in ameliorating human rights abuse.

On the other hand, there are indications that the climate of support for the guerrillas is cooling. Guillermo Ungo, for example, complained in June that the Mexican Foreign Office had "scolded" him for making political statements in Mexico City, although he had done so many times before.

### *The Military View of the Problem*

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—I think that negotiating with the insurgents is just propaganda. I don't think Duarte has that much leverage to be able to deal. I think he's doing it because it satisfies certain public affairs images. But the bottom line is that the Salvadorans are not going to give away what they've earned—what their politicians, what their leadership, have earned at the ballot box. Not going to give away to the guerrillas something that they've no right to. I mean he may negotiate, just as the Marxists have always done, for a tactical advantage. I think that's essentially what Duarte's doing.

When it gets to the bottom line and you get down to power sharing, it's not going to happen.

I (also) don't think the Salvadorans would sit still for the United States enforcing or imposing a solution. I don't think we've got enough leverage. When it comes right down to saying, "O.K. you guys, we've talked about democracy and due process and all that, but we're going to suspend that in order to give the guerrillas a say in Salvador's future." I don't think the Salvadorans would buy it.

The Army would not sit still for it. If you want the Army to take over, force Duarte into negotiation with the guerrillas for power sharing and see how long democracy lasts.

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

## ***The U.S. Invests in the Peace Talks***

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—The ultimate objective was incorrectly drawn. We determined that we were going to improve the capabilities of the Salvadoran military to the point where they could hold their own, and we did that. But we defined as our objective ultimately—and both on the political and the military sides—obliging the President, or encouraging the President and applying pressure across the board, to offer a dialogue to the insurgents. Then, on the military side, we intended that the Salvadoran military continue to apply sufficient pressure to force the insurgents to the negotiating table. Herein lies the basic difficulty: Our ultimate concept appears to be, that by force of military pressure the guerrillas would be obliged to negotiate some acceptable solution with the Salvadoran government. My personal opinion is that this will never occur. The government can't bargain away anything. It has nothing whatsoever that it can bargain away. The President is constrained by the Constitution, and the military will never permit the President to make any unconstitutional concessions to the guerrillas, and, on the other hand, the guerrillas believe that they are going to win. They're certain that we will lose heart eventually, greatly reduce our commitment to El Salvador, and they're going to wait until that occurs, and they're sure it will occur. Then they believe they're going to win. So there is no incentive really for them to bargain. The hard-core Communist leadership of the insurgency has no intention of ever settling for anything less than controlling the country.

But, because of the two sides, the two political philosophies have a different concept of what negotiations are all about. We, on the one hand, think of bargaining in good faith, of reaching an agreement and complying with it. The insurgents and Communists everywhere in the world, on the other hand, look

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

at negotiating, dialogue, bargaining, treaties, or whatever as merely one more step in the political process to ultimate control. It's simply not possible to successfully emerge from a negotiating process without having made some concessions which ultimately will lead to the insurgency starting up again but with the situation being even more disadvantageous. The Salvadorans instinctively know that.

Their [the military's] objective of defeating the insurgency is not in sync with our objective of forcing negotiations. They, therefore, give lip service to our objective because we support them, and we continue at least publicly to insist that what we're looking for is a negotiated solution. The Salvadorans, themselves, know that that's impossible. What I'm saying is that at the political level, one of these days we have to come to terms with what's happening in various parts of the world—particularly in El Salvador.

I'm suggesting that in the final analysis the only viable option that you can offer the insurgents is surrender with pardon. In other words, you can offer them (as the government is doing now) the option of rejoining society and participating in elections and attempting to achieve political power through the political process. That's the only thing you can do. You cannot share power with them. You can't abrogate the current Constitution, which is a legitimate constitution, and say we're going to reconvene a new constituent assembly and that we're going to divide up the membership in some governing body between the insurgents and between the government. You can't do that. It's unconstitutional. It violates the social contract that the present government has with the people.

## ***Negotiating with the Insurgents***

***President José Napoleón Duarte***—In September 1984, a little after my first quarter in office, I shut myself away with my pencil

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 209-13, 215-26. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

and paper, to go over my goals. That evaluation convinced me that the minimal conditions for the dialogue with the guerrilla were going to be in place sooner than I had expected—probably by February, 1985. I was receiving excellent cooperation from the armed forces. The government's relations with the private sector had started off well. The death-squad crimes had decreased significantly.

I considered the timetable. If I waited until February, the month before legislative elections, to begin talks with the guerrillas, any offer I made would be treated as nothing more than a campaign ploy. Either I took the initiative immediately or I would have to postpone it until spring. I decided to make the invitation to the guerrillas as soon as possible. The place I chose was the United Nations General Assembly, and the time October....

Standing at the podium of the world in the great hall of the United Nations, I aimed my words toward the remote mountains of my country, to those Salvadorans killing and dying, not those dispatching messages from the comfort of Managua or Havana.

"I refer to the *comandantes* in the mountains of my country, weathering the elements, able to see the real position of the Salvadoran people when they attack villages," I said. "To those waiting in vain to be received as liberators each time they subjugate the people, to the *comandantes* whose ideals conflict with this reality, who made a mistake about the people and now confront the truth; to the *comandantes* who feel the historic error they are committing."

I acknowledged that these revolutionaries may have had good reason for taking up arms when there was no hope of economic reform, social justice or free elections under the tyranny of the oligarchy allied with the armed forces. El Salvador, however, had changed over the last five years. "I am here to declare and proclaim that as President of the Republic and Commanding General of the Armed Forces, I can uphold, under a constitutional government, the means to permit you to abandon a stand that runs counter to the history of the political evolution of the Salvadoran people."

... I asked the guerrilla leaders from the mountains to meet me, unarmed, in the village of La Palma, Chalatenango province, at 10 A.M. on October 15. It was the anniversary of the 1979 coup that turned El Salvador toward a new path. For that day, we would establish a demilitarized zone in a ten-kilometer radius around the mountain village.

Once my invitation for peace talks was made, my control over the event was gone. The guerrillas decided to send in the political leaders. They wanted to enlarge the delegations, to change the date. I said no to changing the day. To begin by making concessions would have weakened the initiative and lost the momentum gained in the week following my U.N. speech. The Salvadoran government would send five representatives into the talks. The FMLN would send two former colleagues of mine, Ungo and Zamora from abroad, plus two *comandantes* and two "observers" from different guerrilla groups. The only others present would be the Archbishop and Church dignitaries, who would preside....

The presentation we would make to the guerrillas was hammered out in a meeting of the political committee joined by Generals Vides and Blandón, Colonels Flores Lima and López Nuila. To accompany me into the talks, I chose the first and second alternate vice-presidents: Abraham Rodríguez, one of the founders of the Christian Democrats, and René Fortín Magaña, head of the Democratic Action Party, the one center-right party allied with us. I asked the Minister of the Presidency, Rey Prendes, and the Defense Minister, Vides, to come as well.

On the eve of the talks, Joaquín Villalobos, the senior military commander of the guerrillas, sent word that he would not be able to get to La Palma in time.

The day before the talks, Ungo and Zamora arrived with their flock of ambassadors in the airplane provided by Colombia. They entered the Red Cross vehicles, speeding directly to La Palma rather than spending the night in San Salvador as expected. Ungo's family had a summer home in La Palma, from which they slipped off to the guerrilla encampment in Miramundo to confer with the *comandantes*.

At 5 A.M. on October 15, my party prepared to leave in a caravan of a hundred cars from the presidential residence. The Cabinet, the Christian Democratic leaders, everyone seemed to be going with me, all of us unarmed....

People lined the road, waving white flags, crying, "Peace!" Just outside La Palma, we stopped at Carlos Duarte's mountain villa to have breakfast and pass the remaining two hours before we were to walk down to the chapel in the town square where the meeting with the guerrillas would take place.

... The local priest and a major came to tell us everything was ready. We left the cars at the edge of town, but before starting to walk down the winding street my friends and co-workers gathered around me.

Chachi and Abraham walked on either side of me, General Vides just behind.... When I reached the steps of the chapel, the Boy Scout in charge gave me the Scout salute and I returned his handshake. The Archbishop and three other monsignors waited in the arched doorway and led us into the modest concrete chapel.

The pews had been pushed back. A long table was set in the middle of the chapel with six chairs facing one another. There was another table at the end for the clergymen who would preside. We took the seats facing the altar. No protocol greeting had been planned, but when the FMLN leaders filed in they came to shake hands with every one of us.

Once seated, Archbishop Rivera Damas prayed, then said, "Since it was Engineer Duarte who called us together, let's have him speak first."

I started by saying that, as President of the Republic, I had sworn to uphold the constitution. With the same faithfulness with which I had taken that oath, I would look for a solution to our problems within the constitution. I gave a copy of the document to everyone across the table. Then I read the plan for peace we had drafted. It suggested the creation of a special commission: six members selected by the President, six by the guerrillas, led by a moderator designated by the Church. This commission would discuss the ways to end the violence, to bring full political participation and democratic rights to

everyone in El Salvador, permitting the guerrillas to return to peaceful lives. The most important thing was for us not to leave this chapel without providing people with a reason to hope. That, I concluded, was needed more than anything else.

Ungo spoke next, saying it was necessary to find the way to peace. He took issue with several points in my United Nations speech—the history as I outlined it and the implication that there was a discrepancy between the reality perceived by guerrillas in the country and the ideals of those working abroad. He said the conditions in the country had not changed since 1979. The FDR-FMLN was indivisible and had constantly sought peace through negotiations.

Zamora seconded Ungo's analysis, talking about the whole political and social structure that had to be changed. He said we at the table represented the military power of both the guerrillas and the armed forces, the political power both of the Left and of the Christian Democrats which formed a majority of the country. Therefore it was up to us to change the society. He was all for eliminating the Rightist sectors, but I told him that his theory was totalitarian, because I believe that the Right should also be incorporated into the democratic process. Besides, societies cannot be transformed overnight by an agreement. Wouldn't it be more practical to perfect the country through a democratic process and not through destruction?

Cienfuegos spoke longer than anyone else, nearly two hours. He talked about the guerrillas' military achievements. "We never studied it at school, but we've learned how to wage war," he said. He began painting a picture of the country in the harshest terms, highlighting the areas where the guerrillas saw no improvement. But toward the end he admitted there had been changes. The most obvious change was the fact that we were sitting here talking, he said. At one point, realizing he had talked for quite a while, the *comandante* wondered aloud if he should stop.

"Please continue," Abraham Rodríguez spoke up. "I know fairly well what everyone else at this table thinks"—he looked at his former colleagues Ungo and Zamora as he said it—"but I'm deeply interested in what you have to say."



Cienfuegos continued, and then Facundo Guardado, the other guerrilla commander, spoke briefly about the need for peace.

When General Vides' turn came, he declined to speak, saying he could not agree with the guerrillas' military analysis, but we had come to talk about peace, not contradict one another. He added that he supported the peace plan I had presented.

One thing that must have bothered Vides, even more than the rest of us, was Guardado's wearing the uniform of a dead army lieutenant. The name badge had been torn off the dirty uniform, but at the peace table the guerrillas should not have flaunted the fact that they killed one of our men.

This was the only discordant note at La Palma. Otherwise we shared a sense of commitment to peace and to our country, the feeling of being one family. Cienfuegos made a point of chatting with Vides, catching the general as he came out of the bathroom. Cienfuegos also spoke privately to me, asking about his parents, who have been my friends for years. Eduardo Sancho Castañeda (Cienfuegos' real name) is the son of a Costa Rican chemist who settled in El Salvador. I had known the *comandante* as a little boy. During the day of the peace talks many families held brief reunions in La Palma, where relatives came looking for brothers, sons or daughters they knew were fighting with the guerrillas.

When the time for lunch came, Monsignor Gregorio Rosa Chávez asked us if we wanted to take a break, but we decided to continue talking. . . .

Our time for talking was limited. There were air-travel plans and logistics problems, so we set a deadline. A joint document had to be prepared, and Ungo repeated my phrase about not leaving without producing something to answer the people's need for hope. Rey Prendes and Zamora had the task of writing the agreement statement.

We decided to form a commission, with only four representatives from each side, that would study the proposals for peace, find ways to humanize the conflict, develop procedures to incorporate all groups into the peace process, and

do whatever necessary to bring peace as soon as possible. The FDR-FMLN wanted to set a date for the commission to meet, but I advised we work the date out through contracts with the Church. There were too many factors to resolve now. Our joint communiqué said the meeting would be held in the second half of November. We left unwritten two agreements about the exchange of prisoners and the Torola bridge. Both Ungo and I had received petitions from villagers in Morazán, asking us to agree to let the bridge over the Torola River be reconstructed. The bridge, linking the villages north of the river with the rest of the country, had been blown up twice by guerrillas. We rebuilt the bridge in November, but Villalobos' men destroyed it again despite the La Palma agreement.

I had watched the interaction among the guerrilla delegation with interest to see how it reflected their division of power. During the talks, Ungo took charge, but Cienfuegos spoke with more authority. At the end, I watched Ungo turn to Guardado, half apologizing for the lack of progress. Ungo pointed to the bright side by saying, "At least there'll be a second meeting in San Salvador."

We each made a brief statement outside the chapel. The guerrillas then returned through the church to leave by the back door. I said my few words, then followed them, picking up the rest of my colleagues as we headed for the cars. . . .

The next question was, how would everyone react to the prospect of peace? I organized meetings with the private sector, the unions and the military officers. With the High Command, we concluded that the guerrillas would make a show of strength to prove they were not going into the talks because they were losing. The first guerrilla attack came the day after La Palma and confirmed my suspicions that Villalobos intended to exert his influence, scorning Cienfuegos' "weakness" in talking to us. The Army stepped up their own operations throughout the country.

In preparation for the second session of the peace talks, I formed a working group to discuss proposals with each interested sector: the political parties, the Church and the armed forces. We wanted to propose a Christmas truce, a complete

cease-fire. The Church approved. With the military, I suggested that the officers discuss the proposal among themselves without my presence. The officers' discussion was inconclusive. They felt inhibited, unwilling to approve or disapprove the truce.

"Well, then it's my turn to talk," I told the commanders. For eight hours, the military officers and I went over the plan in which I laid out my political and strategic analysis of what the truce would mean.

To see how the guerrillas were thinking, I took advantage of a forum in Los Angeles provided by an academic group that wanted to stage a debate between the government and the guerrillas. I decided to send Rey Prendes and a team with instructions to raise certain points in the debate and see how the FMLN representatives reacted. Afterward, we analyzed their responses carefully. We found that the guerrillas had more interest in a truce as a propaganda device than as a serious step toward a solution. We realized they would not seriously consider a cease-fire, so we reduced our next proposal. We would ask for a limited Christmas truce and humanitarian measures.

The problem of where to hold the second round of peace talks led to more delays. . . . We settled on Ayagualo, a former seminary on a hilltop, run by the Church as a retreat, close to San Salvador and the airport.

Because the second round was meant to be a working session, it didn't seem appropriate for me as President to go. We assumed that my presence would be needed later, after some concrete agreements were prepared. Still, I sent the highest-level delegation I could. It included the Minister of the Presidency, Rey Prendes; the Undersecretary of Defense, Colonel López Nuila; the Planning Minister, Chávez Mena; and the first alternate Vice-President, Abraham Rodríguez. The guerrillas sent Rubén Zamora, seconded only by low-level representatives of the FMLN.

The guerrillas arrived at Ayagualo on November 29, 1984, with their own proposal. It consisted of a three-stage peace plan practically unchanged from the one they circulated in 1979. They wanted an end to American military aid in the first stage,

guerrilla participation in the government and a cease-fire in the second, and by the third stage guerrilla forces to be welded into the "reorganized" armed forces. Then they would call for elections. It was as if they wanted the clock turned back, as if the people's effort in the 1982 and 1984 elections meant nothing, as if the armed forces had not changed at all, as if a Christian Democratic government did not exist, as if everything we had said in La Palma were erased!

... The guerrillas ignored my effort to be realistic and sincere and to work for the benefit of all. They refused to discuss humanization, discarded our cease-fire proposal and rejected even the Church's truce proposal.

After twelve hours of nearly futile discussion, the Ayagualo communiqué announced an agreement to "facilitate free movement on the roads for civilians from December 22 to January 3," and to continue the dialogue. The announcement was anticlimactic, but the speeches following Archbishop Rivera y Damas' reading of the meager communiqué reached a crescendo. Zamora gave a political diatribe that would have caused consternation by itself, and Comandante Guardado followed him with what sounded like a guerrilla recruitment pitch. This was all being carried live on national television. I think Zamora and Guardado directed their remarks to their guerrilla comrades rather than the Salvadoran people. They were sending the guerrillas a message of how tough they could be.

No one missed the guerrilla message or its threat to the peace process. It was so obvious that, in the mansions of the Right, they uncorked the champagne to celebrate the demise of my peace initiative. Everyone in the country felt the surge of frustration and anger. There were those in the armed forces who thought Ayagualo meant the end of any compromise, leaving only a military solution. As my delegation reported back to me, I knew that if I did not do something to counteract the impact of the guerrillas' provocation, we would soon face a crisis and possibly a coup.

There was no time to wait. I went on television to respond in kind to the guerrillas. Weakness on my part would have

meant the end of the dialogue, and I couldn't let down the people who had supported my effort. There are moments to be magnanimous and moments to hold the line.

"Here, before the people," I said, "I state that I'm willing to continue the search for peace, willing to continue the dialogue. But I cannot accept—I categorically reject—any position that is fundamentally unconstitutional. For this reason, I ask those who have taken up arms to rethink their proposal and come up with one in accordance with the spirit of the Salvadoran people."

After Ayagualo, the peace talks stalled. The guerrillas continued to seek more one-day stands, with access to all the media, but I refused. I could not see how progress can be made unless we sit down privately over a period of time, united by some greater principle than a need to share the public platform.

### ***Duarte's Political Motives***

**Colonel James J. Steele**—Duarte got a lot of mileage, both domestic and international mileage, out of the attempts to negotiate; so, he went back to that well a couple of more times. But, I think because of the intransigent attitude of the guerrillas, it has become more of a tactical tool than anything else of late. He saw that very clearly. I think that his expectations were such that this is an opportunity to present the guerrillas essentially for what they are. They are not interested in peace. They are not interested in joining the process. What they're interested in is power. They don't want democracy because they know that they can't compete in that kind of a system. Duarte and the politicians would love more than anything to get the Ungos and the Zamoras back into the system because they know that they can beat them in the system. It's the same reason why the Ungos and the Zamoras aren't coming back into the system, because they know that they don't have the political support base here to win any elections.

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.



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## *U.S. Support for El Salvador*

The Insurgent View

### *U.S. Aid Reflects an Insolent Pursuit of Supremacy*

**Guillermo M. Ungo**—The anti-communism of the oligarchy and of the Army that serves it caused the murder of 30,000 peasants in 1932 and has fueled an even greater massacre today. This ruthless type of anti-communism has been supported by successive U.S. administrations for several decades, chiefly in the form of training for Army officers in military establishments in both the United States and the Panama Canal Zone. These efforts to teach officers to combat the so-called internal enemy have been based on an ominous theory of national security. This view of the problem and of its solution is essentially militaristic. And this approach has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and even children throughout Latin America. In the name of anti-communism and of law and order, dictators such as Nicaragua's Anastasio Somoza Debayle, Paraguay's Alfredo Stroessner, and Chile's Augusto Pinochet Ugarte have brought only death, disorder, insecurity, and instability to the continent.

Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo (political leader of the FPL), "The People's Struggle," *Foreign Policy* 52 (Fall 1983), p. 52-53, 56-57, 60. Copyright 1983 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Reprinted by permission of *Foreign Policy*.

Successive U.S. administrations have followed the same dialectic of friend or enemy that Latin American dictators use, one that confuses friendship with submission and that was clearly rejected by Pope John Paul II during his March 1983 visit to San Salvador. The epithet of subversive or Communist is applied immediately to any who do not submit. The anti-communist dictators, however, are not required to support pluralism or to hold elections, nor are sanctions imposed, credits withheld, or covert actions taken against them. They are considered friends and allies of the United States.

In spite of the unequal strengths of the two belligerents, the Salvadoran war is not being won by the Salvadoran government. Yet the aid sent to the Salvadoran government by the U.S. administration has not been modest or inadequate. It has reached nearly \$1 billion in three years. In a small country such as El Salvador, where the great majority of the population has a per capita income of less than \$250 per year and where in 1979 the government allocated \$9 per person for health and \$24 for education, maintaining each Salvadoran soldier costs U.S. taxpayers \$10,000. The additional sums requested of Congress for 1983 and 1984 would double the cost. Put another way, accepting the Pentagon's own estimates that the guerrilla groups number no more than 7,000 combatants the United States has spent more than \$135,000 per insurgent.

These guerrilla forces are a people's army that operates in a small territory that lacks extensive mountain ranges, easy access to all corners of the country, and other geographic conditions favorable for guerrilla warfare. This people's army lacks airplanes, helicopters, trucks, tanks, and heavy artillery. It has nevertheless been able to resist, develop, and advance while fighting against a much larger and better-equipped force.

U.S. military aid, however, only serves to strengthen the militarist sectors inside El Salvador that oppose dialogue and want to democratize the country by exterminating the opposition.

But the best way to put the ideological, conservative arguments on trial is to pose the question: What would happen to the Salvadoran government if the United States stopped

sending military aid? The Salvadoran government and the Reagan administration have already given a response: They cannot afford to risk such a cutoff. The opposite question, about the supposed Cuban, Nicaraguan, or Soviet aid to the guerrillas, could also be asked. The FDR-FMLN has already responded: That aid does not exist and it is not necessary. To dispel any doubt about this matter, the FDR-FMLN has advocated a negotiated solution to the conflict, sponsored by any governments, witnesses, or international mediators who not only possess respectable reputations but who also are friendly to the United States.

The discussions and guarantees agreed upon during negotiations will allow Salvadorans to resolve the conflict without external interference. For two consecutive years the United Nations General Assembly has approved resolutions calling for the suspension of military aid to the contending parties. Failure to agree to this step will only prolong, deepen, and widen the war in which we Salvadorans provide the corpses. The Reagan administration's responsibility for the continuation, intensification, and regionalization of the war is undeniable. The Reagan administration's role contrasts with the position of the Contadora Group (Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela), which has majority support in Latin America and which rejects a strategy of pacification through a war of extermination covered by a facade of elections.

The Reagan Administration claims that if military aid to the Salvadoran government is terminated, the regime will collapse and El Salvador will fall into the hands of Communists. Consequently, since El Salvador is regarded as the back yard or the front yard of the United States, it is said to be necessary to step up the war and the massacres to save El Salvador. The same mentality was apparent during the Spanish Inquisition, when suspected heretics were burned alive to purify their souls. This rationale reveals a primitive imperialist anti-communism. It destroys the basis for international coexistence, which rests upon a respect for political pluralism among states and upon the right to self-determination and non-intervention. This mentality is also used to justify covert operations intended to destabilize or



overthrow foreign governments. Such operations constitute genuine acts of intervention and war and reflect an insolent pursuit of supremacy.

## ***Forms of U.S. Intervention in El Salvador***

**Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial")**—There are various degrees of intervention, for which imperialism has different means at its disposal. Actually, intervention began some time ago, not only with the U.S. Government's participation in the Junta's programs, but also with military and economic aid and by sending military advisers. But now it takes more concrete and aggressive forms; among them, we can identify three levels.

The first would be to push for what we might call "humanitarian intervention." Carter's administration, and especially Bowdler [Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs—Ed.], has been claiming lately that a military deadlock exists in El Salvador, meaning that neither of the two sides can defeat the other.

... They must assist "humanistically," then, to stop the bloodshed by proposing intervention by the OAS Commission on Human Rights or the "good offices" of democratic governments, so that a formula is found to intervene between the warring groups and stop the hostilities. This would be "merciful mediation," a dangerous and hypocritical mask of imperialism.

But imperialism also has other, more militant means at its disposal. The second level consists of urging the governments of Guatemala or Honduras to intervene in different ways and

Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"), primary leader of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), one of the organizations that make up the FMLN, until his death in 1983. Interview by Adolfo Gilly originally published in Mexico on 4 and 5 January 1981, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 54-56. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

carry out operations of military cooperation or direct intervention itself. The Honduran Army is already systematically crossing the borders of our country to combat revolutionary forces.

The Honduran Army is being armed by the U.S. Government. Within this strategy, the peace treaty between Honduras and El Salvador is nothing more than a bloody pact against the Salvadorean Revolution, conceived by the U.S. Department of State to consolidate a counterrevolutionary triangle of El Salvador-Honduras-Guatemala, and to try in this way to destroy our movement and launch an offensive against the Nicaraguan people.

In terms of training and military aid given to the Salvadorean dictatorship, Venezuela and Israel stand in second place after the United States. France sends no advisers, but sells sophisticated arms to the Junta.

The third stage of intervention, now appearing with more dangerous contours than ever, is direct intervention by the Yankees themselves, a move of desperation if all other attempts to contain our revolution fail. The FMLN once again emphasizes the necessity for international solidarity from all countries to stop direct military intervention of imperialism in our territory.

#### **The Salvadoran Government View**

### ***U.S. Support for El Salvador***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—And once the United States learns that supporting democracies can serve its own interests, then that great nation to the north would no longer be part of our problem. It could contribute to our solution.

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present). *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), p. 92. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

## ***U.S. Support Represents a Great Opportunity for Democracy***

**General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova**—I think that the situation in El Salvador represents a great opportunity for the United States. The type of struggle that we are dealing with here is the best indication of a marked difference between a Marxist revolution in Nicaragua and a democratic revolution in El Salvador. We are going to provide our people with the support they need to be able to work, to be able to shape their own destiny, and to be able to become independent from us in the future. While there is democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of politics, democratic institutions will be able to flourish in this country. In spite of the internal crisis we have to deal with, we are trying to accomplish these tasks. But we must not only provide assistance in terms of military aid. Instead it should be more substantial. The aid we were receiving before the earthquake was very convenient. But, today the support is more limited due to a series of external problems we have no control over. This situation could prove to be counterproductive for us in the future. As the smallest country in Latin America, El Salvador will inevitably serve as an example for all other Latin American countries. When we manage to stop the progress of the Communist movement here, no other country will want to stay behind in this struggle and watch El Salvador with its very small armed forces accomplish this goal. They will all want to try to surpass the efforts and successes of this country. However, the most important aspect is that we must receive the necessary aid and support now, not only to solve our internal problems, but to successfully achieve independence in the future, to generate more jobs to improve the welfare of our population.

General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987.

Within the context of what we are discussing now, I must refer to the need to acquire patience. The United States is very impatient. I keep telling them that we must provide a popular prolonged resistance to a popular prolonged war. If the subversives choose to fight constantly, I will constantly resist and defend what is rightfully mine. We must be equally persistent and patient in this struggle and not think about how long the war has lasted in El Salvador six or seven years. Instead, we must think positively and that El Salvador has been able to resist the heavy blows it has suffered during this time, and for that reason, neither Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, nor others have fallen. Then, if we continue to maintain a strong front, it doesn't matter whether or not the results are successful. If this barrier we have created continues to resist the advance of enemy forces for the next 10-20 years, I believe we should not remove it simply because we are bored of dealing with it. It is important that we remain patient throughout this conflict. It is important, in my view, that the United States' policy has remained consistent throughout this war, and even more important is the constant support and good will on the part of President Reagan during this crisis. Then, sometimes we must resign to the fact that not enough aid was received at a particular time. But we must realize that there was someone who made an effort to provide us with what we needed, and that boosts the people's morale, the armed forces' morale. This also makes a good impression on future allies for the United States.

It is very difficult to focus on democratic principles when one is at war. Nevertheless, I am a firm believer that the best way to approach this conflict and attain a peaceful solution is through a democratic process and support for human rights rather than ignoring these fundamental aspects and trying to win through "quick fix" solutions. It is more important, in my view, to win this war two or three years later. But once the war has been won we should begin to attain peace and strengthen our country. That is why democracy, respect for human rights, and a professional and apolitical armed forces are vital to our institution.

## ***Were It Not for U.S. Support, El Salvador Probably Would Not Have Survived***

**General Juan Rafael Bustillo**—We had quite an experience in 1981. However, due to several factors, we were very weak. First, we could not rely on any support because none of the friendly nations trusted the government and armed forces at the time—a provisional government backed by a junta. We had neither economic nor military support. We were in a very difficult situation. We had no counselling at the time, and we barely depended on ambassadors and military attaches to fulfill their diplomatic missions. The work they performed was mainly as observers. We were very interested in maintaining diplomatic relations with other countries because we felt the need for some foreign diplomatic representation to witness the outcome of the events in this country. However, these foreign governments never provided any aid for other democratic countries or those countries seeking solutions to end their conflicts and establish democracies. But on the side of the opposition, you do see a constant unity of effort and mutual assistance being provided. In this respect, the United States is the only country that has supported our cause. Unfortunately, our Latin American neighbors have never provided us with any assistance, and some day they could face a similar problem. This is not to say that all the Salvadorans are good-hearted. Perhaps some day even we may develop similar attitudes and refuse to help our neighboring countries who are facing the same difficulties we are.

Venezuela's situation has improved somewhat, but Peru, Ecuador, and Chile could face the same problems we have. Some day they may even need Salvador to support them, even if it means we have to provide moral support. Even to suggest the possibility of providing economic aid is quite remote because we've never received any. If it weren't for the support we've received from the United States, this country would probably be just another domino.

General Juan Bustillo, Chief of Salvadoran Air Force, 1979 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 January 1987.

## ***Modern War Is Not Fought with Rifles Only***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—Our soldiers, guards, and, most of all, our officers must learn to accept the fact that today's war is not fought in a conventional way. During my last visit to Fort Gulick in Panama, I attended a graduation ceremony in honor of the last group of cadets. When they showed me their core curriculum, I told them they lacked one course which could teach them the basic facts, that today's wars are no longer the conventional wars of the past. They no longer have the fundamental characteristics of a regular war. Now, they are totally different because the promoters start out by looking for a motivation, then they look for a cause, and finally they manage to slowly win the will of the people. The military must be prepared for this. Soldiers and officers must learn to fight this new war, this modern war. They should no longer depend on rifles only. That was yesterday's concept. Presently, we are conscious of the fact that each military activity or maneuver that we perform must be along the same lines as those factors presented by today's war. If we happen to arrive at some city and clean it up, the civilian forces must immediately come in and restore the public services, talk to the people, create a local infrastructure, and end corruption with the use of every means Latin American or Third World countries have. Since 1981, we have been following this pattern.

We, as military men, fail in this regard because we have a preconceived notion as to how to confront a military situation, but we don't have the capabilities to confront a social or political situation. The problem is rather complex. We must regard, simultaneously, the six factors of the war, and in this type of war they are equally important. If we happen to disregard one of these factors, it would prove to be disastrous. For example, if we wanted to improve militarily, economically, in propaganda, and diplomatically and the social factor was

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

excluded, the result would be catastrophic. If the people are unhappy there is really no purpose to continue improving in other areas, because their contentment is crucial in order to be able to improve in other areas and restore the country.

#### Views from U.S. Practitioners

### *An Unpredictable Ally*

**General John R. Galvin**—The Salvadoran armed forces would say that without the United States, they probably would have been defeated by the so-called final offensive that took place in 1981. The Salvadoran armed forces felt that we came to their rescue. At the same time we are viewed as unpredictable, unreliable allies who cannot find it in our hearts and minds and pocketbooks to sustain anything that we do for very long. So that, in the Salvadoran military thinking, there was always the question of how much longer can we persuade the United States to continue helping us, or when will the day come when once again we are on our own. And, given the difficulties that the Salvadorans were having with the economy, the military aid and the economic aid—by the way that was on a ratio of one dollar military aid to four dollars economic aid during the period that I was there—that aid sustained the country and helped to fight the war. But, the realization that it could end at any time, and very often it was, in effect, hanging by its fingernails on the edge of the cliff, the realization that it could end at any time, that the Congress might vote it out, made it extremely difficult to plan ahead.

I think that the U.S. military and the Ambassador and the country team in El Salvador were respected for the most part by the Salvadoran armed forces and by the Salvadoran government during this period. I don't think that the Salvadorans felt that we had a corner on the market of counter guerrilla operations by any means. I think that we were assisting them by basically providing resources for the fighting and, to some degree,

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

the doctrine of counter guerrilla operation. But a great deal of that doctrine was also being produced in the form of the "School of Hard Knocks" as the Salvadoran armed forces went out to fight the war. This was basically good, this was very good, because the Salvadorans had the confidence that came from the fact that they indeed were the ones who were fighting the war, and we were in a secondary position helping them.

Our military did not go out and fight. They didn't go lower than brigade level. And this was good. The Salvadorans could always maintain their pride. They were not puppets. They were not somebody who had to have an advisor following along in every military contact, telling them what to do. They knew what to do in combat. What they needed was resourcing from us for the most part. Now, I did find that they were always willing to accept considered advice, and they were willing to act on it. But that advice was normally intelligence. We had the means of gaining intelligence about the guerrillas that we were able to pass to them and that they accepted very much. We also tried to study the war for them in terms of the logistics, the combat operations, and where we could, we tried to provide advice. I think most of that advice was good, and I think most of that advice was accepted. But, we were not running the war. We assisted them in making Plan Maquilishuat (later to become the National Plan). But we didn't write the entire plan for them. When it came time to write Unidos Para Reconstruir, they were much better at it then, and they, the Salvadorans, wrote that whole plan with a little bit of assistance here and there from us. That's the way it was done, and that's the way it should have been done.

## ***U.S. Legislative Debates Were Not Helpful***

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—U.S. recognition of the place was important. Some interesting things were happening that

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.



helped. There was a great deal of high-level interest in Washington. At times it was too much and at other times it was helpful. My view of that was, if they wanted to support what I wanted to do, it was great, and if they wanted me to do something I didn't want to, I'd just as soon there hadn't been that much high-level interest. That's life.

I don't think the legislative debate, the uncertainty, was helpful. Field commanders in El Salvador like to know where they are and what resources they are going to have to do the job. We lived with a great big rumpus over certification [of progress in human rights], a continuing one over human rights. I didn't like certification—don't like certification. I viewed it as a way for the Congress to avoid its responsibilities and to dump the hard decisions back on the President. Both to be for and against something at the same time, that's their certification procedures.

They didn't want to take the responsibility to deny resources to the government of El Salvador, and on the other hand they didn't want to endorse it, so they created a certification procedure and made the rest of us jump through the hoop. I guess I never did like it, don't like it. It comes close, in my view, to being unconstitutional. If it isn't, then in any case it is a political cop-out by a lot of Congressmen.

## ***U.S. and Southern Command Policy toward El Salvador***

**Major General James R. Taylor**—I think the U.S. policy is a commitment to provide the material and economic support that is required for Duarte to finish the war. That does not imply an open-ended checkbook. We are not going to get as much money this year as we got last year. But from what I can tell we have been able to obtain most of what we need, or what we think the ESAF needs, out of the Congress and the American people in terms of money and equipment. There have been occasional

Major General James R. Taylor, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama), 1986 to 1987, interviewed at Fort Amador, Republic of Panama, 14 December 1986.

hiccups. At least right now, setting aside the Irangate fiasco (or whatever it is that you want to call it), the ultimate impact is that we are committed, probably at some decreasing level of effort over the next decade, to support the government of Salvador as long as it continues the way it is as a legitimate body, duly elected by the people, cognizant of the human rights issues and the values that we support.

I would say that, in basic terms, our (USSOUTHCOM) strategy is to do everything that we can to assist the Mil Group and their effort to assist the ESAF, to support the U.S. Ambassador in El Salvador in his efforts to support the Salvadoran government, and to represent the United States and U.S. interests up there. USSOUTHCOM is dedicated to the organizational battle of acquiring the resources that are needed in terms of the MAP and IMET and FMS dollars that are available. Every functional system that we have is geared towards providing (for example, the intelligence systems) the support that the Salvadorans need. Clearly, at least in my mind, there is a support from government to government. But we are thinking too much of the shooting phase of LIC [low-intensity conflict] and not thinking enough about what we have to do before we get to that stage. We are looking at it isolated in a vacuum of military balance. We're not looking at all at other things that must be applied with that: the civic action projects, the PSYOPS planning and campaigning, and the intelligence preparation. We are not looking at the type organizations that are needed to support all of those functions or some sort of unit that can be employed which could put those functions together in support of our war plans (should we ever have to go to war) but can also be forward deployed to work for the CINC in that part of the conflict before the shooting starts. If we do it right, we can win the war before we have to fire a round.

### ***U.S. Policy and Support Has Been Piecemeal***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—It's incredible. We've had carrier battle groups. We've had battleship groups steaming off the coasts.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

In my view, it's not totally but almost totally irrelevant to the problem. And the cost of steaming one of those battle groups for one day would have provided the kind of human and small boat capability that we required to help the brown water navies of the region perform professionally. So there's another tremendous problem—trying to bring what resources existed in DOD to bear. Then, when you focus on formulation of policy, I went and talked to various departments and agencies, as I mentioned, each time I visited Washington. At that time there was a loose and informal structure called the Core Group, chaired by Assistant Secretary of State ARA, with representatives from DOD, CIA, NSC, who met, I think, on a rather informal basis. My impression was the whole thing was sort of played out of somebody's pocket, that there was not a sufficient integrated, coordinated effort from the interested, responsible departments and agencies put together on a continuing basis. They met once in a while in an office for 30 minutes, an hour, two hours, I don't know how long they met. I only attended a couple of the meetings ... so I may not be a competent judge, but it appeared to be ... sort of off the top of somebody's head. That, in my view, is no way to formulate policy. I have since talked in a lot of places about my views of how it ought to be done, and I've written some more recently.

I have frequently commented that I was the only senior representative of a department or agency of the U.S. Government in the region. When I looked around for my counterparts in the State Department and the CIA, they were in Washington, and I had to deal with individual country ambassadors and station chiefs. That sort of arrangement just doesn't work very well. In my view there is a problem in Washington of assessing issues outside Washington. It's very difficult for someone who works in Washington, whether it's in DOD, the State Department, or the CIA, to objectively and sensibly evaluate regional issues. Assistant secretaries deal with ambassadors and station chiefs from one level to another, country by country, and probably do a pretty good job. But I don't think they do a very good job when they try to focus at theater level, as we call it, or the regional level.

I, therefore, believe, in a crisis period in particular—such as I think we've been in since 1980 in Central America—we should organize what I call superembassies on a regional level. Not only should there be a theater commander who represents DOD, but there should also be a State guy, assistant secretary level, responsible for coordinating political/military issues, all the ambassadors and so forth. He should be in the region. I think the CIA guy responsible for the region should be in the region. They should be collocated somewhere, wherever whatever country allows us to put a superembassy together to deal with U.S. regional interests. That's where they ought to be, and they ought to be working together. They ought not to be in Washington. I think we would be more successful in analyzing regional problems, coming up with regional solutions, proposed solutions, and inputs to the policy formulation effort in Washington if you had all these representatives living and working together in the region. I think you get a much more relevant, a much clearer view of the problem in the region than you get in Washington. Their responsibility should be to provide inputs to the formulation process in Washington. They should be principally responsible for the execution of the policy. If they would work together in a superembassy kind of framework, I think we would have seen in Central America a hell of a lot better effort that we've achieved piecemeal.

### ***Greater U.S. Military Support Might Be Inappropriate***

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**—What we were doing was trying to sell small technology. We kept a lid on the number of helicopters. We weren't really enamored with the A-37 [small fixed-wing combat aircraft], but we'd inherited it. We were looking for more radios for the troops, better boots, rations that would allow them to go out into more extended operations

Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987.

rather than taking all the kitchen out and then hearing the pitter-patter of the pans making tortillas at wee hours of the morning. There's lots of little things that we thought were needed. The Salvadorans had plenty of people to put on the ground, and that's what we wanted. Saturate the countryside rather than have them fly over the people they'd pledge to defend. And, so we were interested in better patrol boats and better communications and smaller units and all those things. We practitioners of counterinsurgency through the years have always been saying, "Hey, this is what you really need to do." You don't need to do this and that. You don't need to write a check on the national treasury. What you have to do is force these guys, give them the training equipment and then force them, to do what needs to be done, which is go out and show the people that you're out there amongst them. And you know, we go Mao Tse-tung—the water and the fishes. I think Hinton rightly viewed with some suspicion USSOUTHCOM's desire to take over and gadgetize the war, turn it into one that was going to be dependent upon things rather than on people.

In this context, everybody wants to be a practitioner of low-intensity conflict. Well, everybody, in order to be a practitioner of low-intensity conflict, has got to think in terms of something besides the 82nd Airborne [Division], the 1st Marines, 101st, the 7th, or Light Division. And we're a long way from that. Somebody needs to go in there with a hammer or with a machete and just do a gut on those curriculums [at our service schools] and get them back in line with what the real world is all about. The Pacific and the USSOUTHCOM AOs [Area of Operations] have got to be able to deal with something besides the conventional threat. In order for us, the Army to provide qualified staff officers who know the area and who are willing to say, "We don't need two thousand widgets; we need the host country to do X, Y, and Z." They don't need to buy 200 fast movers. They need to buy boots and rations, and we need to train them in small unit tactics. They have to quit going out and beating up on people at night. None of this has anything to do with the Department of Defense's role in fighting the Russians in the Fulda Gap [Germany] or Europe. But we don't

train our troops in this environment. We don't really effectively train our officer corps in this environment. Only those few Mavericks who insist on going to the sound of the guns that aren't Russian (at least directly) are really qualified to deal with those kinds of problems, and they're the exception to the rule.

### ***Blessed with a Small Staff***

***Ambassador Thomas Pickering***—In a way we were blessed with a small staff but overwhelmed by the number of problems. Everybody was constantly overworked, and we never got all the things done in the way that we should have. We were only able to focus on a few of our priority tasks. We constantly had to reinvent wheels. One of the key examples was that the whole civil defense program, when I was there, was in the hands of one Special Forces sergeant. He did a superb job. It was the sort of thing which, in other circumstances, you might have expended a company of Special Forces on. But the real reason why it got done well and right was because this guy had the conceptual approach, the training, the experience, and the background to put it rapidly on the back of the Salvadorans that he had trained to get it done. In a sense, one of the things that helped us the most—though and it was one of our biggest problems in the eyes of a lot of people—was the limitation we imposed on ourselves, in order to gain congressional confidence in our approach, on the number of U.S. military people we had. In the last analysis I would judge that that was an ingredient for success rather than failure. It could have been an ingredient for failure if the insurgency problem had gotten bigger much more rapidly, but somehow we were able to contain the problem within the scope of the limitations and with the number of people we had. We were able to demand and we got Paul Gorman's and Jack Galvin's support for absolutely top class personnel. We had the people managing the military systems mission attuned to moving military personnel in and out

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

very rapidly. We had a way of proceeding that in effect guaranteed that we made the best use of the people that we had and got rid of the people who didn't hack it very rapidly. That was just about right for what we needed even though we were stretched thin. But if we had been free to organize in the usual fashion, we may well have had a top-heavy, inefficient, unresponsive, unattuned, and lackadaisical approach to the problem, which might have sunk us.

We were able to manage the military personnel side because we had the full backing of the four-star Commander of the Unified Command on the one hand and Washington on the other. We were also able to manage by doing as many things out of country as we could. That helped us because it reduced our profile and vulnerability. And we were able to manage because the military saw the need to give us absolutely top-flight people and to put into the hands of the Military Group Chief, who ran it, a lot of authority for shuffling people around and moving people in and out and for constantly developing and building new priorities. We had a good service from our people, in terms of Spanish language capability, where they were really needed in the Salvadoran military, and we tried to get people out of places where they were superfluous. We were prohibited from having anybody engaged with any combat unit, which meant that the combat units didn't have the American crutch to fall back on or to blame. They succeeded or failed, and their own lives were at stake and so the immediate need for their becoming self-reliant and successful was very real. We tried to run the training program with as few Americans and as many Salvadorans as possible and ditto with almost everything else. It was training them to become the trainers rapidly. The out-of-country training gave us some breathing space, and it also meant we could put more people into the training program without having to carry the burden of them in-country. That made a big difference to us in terms of being able to manage our own relationships. It was an interesting model. We almost backed into it. I wouldn't say that it's the tried and true formula for dealing with every problem. You have to be careful. But in the long run, it proves the general maxim that a lot of us had

who have dealt with these kinds of problems in the past. If you can stay lean, trim, and mean for a very long period of time and keep the lid on personnel bloat, you can win or at least you can hold your own.

### *The View from the Mil Group*

**Colonel James J. Steele**—The Mil Group provides basically three things. We provide materiel, we provide training, and we provide advice. We do that consistent with the policy of the U.S. Government as implemented by the Ambassador.

Training is focused more and more on their [Salvadoran] cadres, their instructors, and their leaders than to train their soldiers and their units. Early on in the conflict we focused heavily on training units over in Honduras, even in the States, and that was probably absolutely critical at that time. One of our problems is that there is the tendency for us to want to organize their units around how we are organized. This gets right into the issue of "What kind of people do you need here? How many do you need?" and so on. Nobody has cursed the 55-man limit more than I probably have in the last two and a half years, but I just have to tell you that doing it with a low U.S. profile is the only way to go. If you don't, you immediately get yourself into trouble, because there is a tendency for Americans to want to do things quickly, to do them efficiently— and the third step in that process is to do it yourself. If you take that third step here, you have lost the battle. What we've done is focus even though it takes longer, and it's not as efficient, working with the Salvadoran cadres and their leaders to do it.

Keep in mind that when you try to do it yourself, you're imposing what is going inevitably to be viewed as a Gringo solution. When you do that, you assume the responsibility to make it work. They have a ready-made excuse if they don't like it or don't want to support it, and that is to say, "Well, it's a

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.



Gringo solution, and it won't work here." So to the extent that you can make their institutions work or you can take what they have, whether it's leadership in the form of people or it's organization or even equipment, you ought to do that. It works and it's worth the effort.

As you look at the issue of how to fight an insurgency, one of the important questions is, "How much time do you have?" The Brits have taken a different view in the past. They recognized early on that leadership is probably the critical ingredient. It's the one that probably takes the longest to develop in the host country, if it doesn't exist there before. So, their inclination is to assume the leadership role themselves. We are far less inclined to do that. In Vietnam we played an active role by sending advisors to the field, and, even though they weren't actually commanding, they were, for all practical purposes, doing just that. So, if you want things to happen faster, that's an option that you can consider, short of actually imposing your leadership on them. But, you pay a price, because you don't develop the infrastructure; you undermine their leadership in many ways when you do that.

The way we've done it in El Salvador has been expensive, I suppose, in terms of dollars spent, and it's taken some time. But, I think it's the way to do it. What's developing there is not something that will go away as soon as we reduce our levels of support. It's going to stay. Even though we're talking about a program that ranges between \$120 million and \$196 million over the past few years, when you talk about fighting a war, that's really cheap. That's not to suggest that that is not a lot of money and the U.S. taxpayers aren't making a major effort. It's one of the largest programs in the world, but, when you consider how much it costs in peacetime to field a U.S. division and you consider the impact of losing a country here, it's pretty cheap.

How do you fight their kind of war militarily? The doctrinal answer is that you fight it with small units. You fight it at night. You fight it with a lot of ambushes. That's been the focus of the Mil Group trainers, certainly during my two and a half years here. I know it was prior to my arriving here. When I

got here, I visited just about every battalion in the country. The thing that struck me was, never mind the quality considerations of leadership, but the quantity problem. You'd go to a battalion, a 600-man unit, and it would be commanded by a lieutenant. That's a lieutenant colonel's billet in anybody's army. Then you go down to the company level, and it's commanded by second lieutenant. Then you'd go down to what we would call a platoon, or what they call a section, and you'd be hard pressed to find anybody that you could really describe as an effective leader.

Why did that situation exist? Well, it existed because there was a tremendous force expansion—a 13,000-man force, expanded dramatically to a force that now exceeds 50,000 in a very relatively short period of time. Well, when you expand a force like that, if you have someone like the U.S. helping you, you can provide uniforms and weapons for the soldiers. There are a lot of people in El Salvador, and recruiting is not such a major problem, but you don't build battalion commanders, company commanders, platoon leaders, and first sergeants in six months. You don't do that in a year! So, what happened was, as the force expanded, the leadership was diffused. The lesson learned here is that you have to manage the force expansion very carefully.

Anybody who gets caught up in this business of 10 to 1 force ratio to beat an insurgency is naive. I'd like to get my hands around that guy's throat! It's so simplistic! Every country has its own force ratio. It's a product of how good the troops are, how bad the guerrillas are, how many leaders you have to begin with, and a whole host of considerations. As you expand a force in a crisis you have to keep in mind what it takes to continue to lead that force effectively. We've probably expanded here too quickly for the leadership. If it hadn't been for guys like Waghelstein and Stringham putting such an investment in leadership training, sending cadets off to the States for training and so on, we would still be way behind the power curve. But, that situation has changed slowly, because we've seen the force structure pretty much level off in terms of numbers, and now the leadership is catching up. You go back

today to visit that same battalion, and now it's going to be commanded by a captain and maybe a major. You go down to the companies, and they'll be usually commanded by first lieutenants. You go to the section or platoon level, and, lo and behold, there's somebody down there; maybe he's a second lieutenant. Maybe he's a cadet, or he might even be a senior NCO. It's still not ideal. You don't have the kind of squad leader, team leader leadership that you would want to have.

You've got a structure down there so that you can give that platoon a mission to go out and set up an ambush at this location tonight, and it'll happen. So, that's something that's evolved over time, and it's significant. If you looked at a typical operation in early 1984, unless you were talking about a special unit, it was that lieutenant and 600 guys behind him. That was an operation! I could talk, or my predecessor could talk, about small unit operations until we were blue in the face, and it wasn't going to happen when you have that kind of leadership quotient.

Speaking to the equipment problem, let me say this. One of the problems that we're going through right now is that we're operating on a [U.S. Congressional] Continuing Resolution, which means that we still don't know how much money we're going to have for 1987. We only have a limited amount of money to start with, which means that we're going to have to put that money in the kinds of things that you can't afford to run out of, like supplies and ammunition. Unfortunately, that means that some of the end-items, helicopters, or whatever that require greater lead times are going to have to be deferred until we get full funding. That means that those items are not going to be players for months and months from now.

When I first got here or when Stringham was here or when Waghelstein was here, those guys, essentially, were living from one Supplemental [Appropriation] to another, and so was I the first year. It was very difficult for us to do any planning and absolutely impossible for the Salvadorans to do any planning. Even though 1984 was a big year when you tallied it all up, but because it was a series of supplementals, at any one point up until the last few months, you didn't know whether or not you

were going to have any more money coming in. So, rather than doing any sort of planning or force development or investing in some capital improvements, you spent the money on things that you just couldn't afford to run out of. That usually meant ammunition, personal equipment, and so on. Therefore, it seems to me that one of the big lessons learned is that you just cannot do that. You can't expect people to fight a war with that sort of uncertainty. I think that even though levels for the last two years have been lower than 1984, we've gotten a lot more for our money. We knew how much we were going to get. We were able to plan. We were able to buy the equipment that we needed and at the same time keep the ammunition levels at adequate levels. You knew when the next boat was going to come, and you didn't take it down to zero, but you could take it down to the point where you could anticipate the next delivery.

I have to tell you that the security assistance mechanisms and procedures are not designed for fighting a war. We really need a better legislative basis for supporting our friends who are battling an insurgency.

### ***Comments on the Period as the War Changes Direction: A Look at the Archers and the Forest***

THE EDITORS—The mobile warfare stage of the conflict was also a war of attrition. In those terms, government forces had the advantage. They had more manpower, more ability to replace manpower, and—with the help of the United States—more equipment and other resources than the insurgents. Those advantages, coupled with significant reforms, allowed the government and the regular Salvadoran armed forces to reverse the tide of the struggle. At that point in time, it appears that the insurgent leadership agreed there had been another shift in the primary center of gravity—a new strategic element. The shift was away from the government's military force to the source of that force's

power—the aid provided by the United States. As a result, borrowing heavily on the training and instruction received from the Vietnamese, the strategy became one of taking a relatively low profile militarily, negotiating, targeting the U.S. Congress as the principal objective in the war of information, and waiting for the United States to disengage from Central America and the Salvadoran conflict.

During this waiting time, the insurgents have taken the operational defensive. But, in their doctrine, defense is only a short-term situation in which preparations are made for a new offensive. Thus, while planning and staging semiannual large “spectacular” attacks for propaganda and media effect, they have broken down into small units with basically political and psychological objectives. In this phase of “prolonged people’s war,” the idea is to continue assassinations, kidnappings, and general terrorism in order to constantly harass and intimidate the population and the government. Moreover, attacks on transportation and communications nets, and other economic targets are continued in order to sabotage government attempts to do anything which might improve the economic aspect of regime legitimacy. Other examples of these types of “military” objectives would include tying-up security forces, which then allows general freedom of movement and the security necessary for their renewed education and recruitment of the masses; the mounting of occasional large-scale attacks, which indicate formidable military capabilities; and proving a continued will to win. In short, their general purpose is to demoralize the people, the government, the armed forces, and any outside supporters—and accomplish indirectly what cannot be won through direct military action.

The insurgent’s objective and the general result of their waiting strategy have been to produce a situation in which the United States appears to be lessening its commitment and interest in the conflict. Having shifted

their strategic centers of gravity away from the armed forces and back to the legitimacy of the Salvadoran government and the external support provided by the United States to that government, the insurgents have also generated a situation in which the regular Salvadoran armed forces "can go anywhere they want to in the country," but still have not been able to defeat the insurgency. At the same time, the insurgents have not won the war either. Neither side has won; neither side has lost. The result is stalemate. But, Sun Tzu reminds us that "There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited."\*

\*Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 73.

*Part V*

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*Stalemate:  
1986 to the  
Present*



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## *Prolonged People's War: The Salvadoran Context*

THE EDITORS—As the FDR/FMLN internalized the concepts of a prolonged people's war, they settled into a long-term defensive strategy. The forces at work within the Salvadoran government also began to shift their position. As a matter of survival, they had had to think and act in terms of what was absolutely necessary at the moment. For some time, it had been assumed that the military component of the insurgency was a major center of gravity and that if it were destroyed the FDR/FMLN would lose its vitality and ability to act as a meaningful force in El Salvador.

The fact is that this or any insurgency does not have a single military center of gravity. It is a political organism which uses terror and other more conventional military means as only part of its arsenal. As a consequence, the Salvadoran leadership began to reorient their thinking from defeating the FMLN military, to engaging the other dimensions of the war. Winners are generally those who are flexible enough to disregard previous strategies and fashion new ones. But, there is some risk in going against established wisdom.

Several problems arise that can put the outcome of the political-military effort at risk. First, having ostensibly won the military battle, there is the problem of convincing one's compatriots and allies—notably the United States—that the war is not over. That, in order to secure real



peace and democracy, a long-term commitment is required. Second, there must be a balance of political ends with military means. The failure to establish this balance is a clear formula for ultimate disaster. Third, in order to solve the first two problems, there must be a clear vision of the threat, the means to deal with that threat, and the political future. In an overall view, the greatest risk of all is in continuing a primarily military effort in a singularly political struggle.

### *Discontinuity of the Offensive*

**Joaquín Villalobos**—The absence of continuity is not determined by a conservative will, but rather it is determined by the same characteristics that the war assumes. The vacuum that appears between the distinct stages is due to a real expansion of our forces. And this was of greater importance once we arrived at the stage of forming our army. Here, the physical exhaustion, the exhaustion of supplies, the exhaustion of logistical reserves is something very real. The enemy himself passed from campaigns of 20 days to campaigns of eight days and later of four or five days.

Why? Because each time the exhaustion factors affect him more, because his behavior is that of an army and therefore the exhaustion factor weighs more heavily upon him. There have been moments in which physically we had to stop. There are those that have argued for the need to maintain a quantitative continuity; in other words, to be on the move, acting continuously. We feel that it is preferable at a given moment to stop, to make an overall reassessment, and to look for a new strategic target against which we can use 100 percent of our forces with the goal of achieving a significant change, a turnaround in the situation. You get better results by executing a group of actions in one period than you get

Joaquín Villalobos, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), one of the organizations which forms the FMLN. Interview by Marta Harnecker was originally published in Mexico, November-December 1982, and later published in *Revolution and Intervention in Central America*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications/CM Associates, 1983), pp. 103-105. Copyright 1983 by CM Associates. Reprinted by permission of CM Associates.

from the quantitative sum of operations that are not united within a maneuver.

The 10th of January had that virtue. We could have used all our armed potential accumulated for January 10 in another way, more spaced out, more continuous, with successive operations. That would have been a grave error. We would not have stopped the enemy. Now, to have stopped it, to have strained it at the same time, what did it mean? It meant the quartering of the army, the cessation of offensives and the possibility for us to gain time to secure ourselves in given territories. Now, did that bring a period of relative stability? Yes, it did, but it was for our benefit. The same will be true at other stages. We have achieved a strategic accumulation of victories which will be expressed in a final culminating moment. But because of the characteristics of our situation, because of the decrease in the insurrection potential—especially of the urban masses—the offensive cannot be maintained in an ever ascending spiral.

Now, what will be the form in which the masses participate in this final phase of the war? It is difficult to make a prediction about this.

First, it must be repeated that the masses would never have been able to create the powerful popular army which we have at present. Now, it still remains to be seen whether the masses are going to mobilize at this point in an insurrectional form, or in the form of a general strike, or by way of a massive incorporation into the revolutionary army. What we know is that the popular war advances with giant steps, that the struggle itself consolidates more and more unity among our forces, and this allows us to hit the enemy each time more forcefully.

## ***Prolonged People's War Is Fundamentally Ideological***

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**—The situation began to change. In July '84, a document was discovered which

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

revealed the subversives' acknowledgment of the fact that they had suffered severe blows and heavy setbacks, along with a series of recommendations to change their tactics. They had once operated in large units, but due to their misfortune they had to group into smaller ones in order to try to avoid coming into contact with us. I would like to point out one factor, within the context of this situation, that is fundamental, one which is normally not studied and learned through the experience of others. We always want to learn from our own experience, and we always want to reread the same books. I'm referring to a concept which the subversives refer to as a popular prolonged war. What does this popular prolonged war consist of? Well, first of all it consists of developing small units, controlling small territories, developing a national conscience, seeking external support in other sectors, and creating capable command groups.

When they talk about prolonged people's war, they clearly establish that at the beginning they are a minority force. They have to improve, and they have to undergo three stages of the prolonged people's war, which are (1) the strategic defensive on the part of the Marxist forces, (2) the strategic equilibrium, that is, when a parity occurs in the results rather than in the forces, and (3) the strategic offensive on the part of the Marxist forces. We have to understand that the Marxists utilize what they call a correlation of forces. For example, an armed military force could be small, but its own operativity—its own simple logistics, its own mobility, its own operational tactics, its own respect for the laws of war, its own taking advantage of the conditions that are presented throughout the war—will influence in order for that small force at a determined moment—probably smaller in numbers—to have a concurrence of those external factors, a favorable situation that could oppose a much more organized force. That is what they refer to as strategic equilibrium.

The third phase is what is assumed when the Marxist forces pass to the strategic offensive and the government forces pass to the strategic defensive. That is to say, it is the decisive moment in the battle, as they refer to it, and it is the moment where the



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On 10 October 1986, a severe earthquake struck. These soldiers from the Signal Corps School assisted in the cleanup effort after the massive disaster.

final blow takes place in order to destroy the democratic forces, to consolidate their movement, and to achieve political power. That is what they have established as the prolonged people's war. The prolonged people's war, then, has a distinct expression of what a regular war is. It cannot be strictly military. The military aspect of it is a component of the prolonged people's war. But the prolonged people's war also pursues a progressive wearing down of the government forces. It pursues the indoctrination of the *masas* and a permanent activity of the *masas*. It pursues the destruction of the state's economy in order to take away the economic support for the government forces. If we do not have a strategic rear guard, economically speaking, we cannot operate. Then, fundamentally, it seeks that. It also seeks to take away the international political support the government receives from

other countries, and it attempts to group those political forces that oppose the government and are in favor of Marxist forces. Anyone that is opposed by the government, the Marxist forces try to win over in order to form the people's front, which is another term used by Mao Tse-tung, developed at the outset of his prolonged people's war.

Truly what is fundamental here is that the enemy is motivated and has an ideological motivation. They want to create a new society, while at the same time we are trying to teach our own to defend and protect their own systems. But, if our soldier is expected to defend his own system, he must be able to believe in it and receive the proper benefits of the system. I cannot go around ordering Soldier "X" to defend the institution of democracy when he doesn't even know what democracy really is. If he is barefoot, barely dressed, and hungry, he can't be expected to believe in the benefits that a democratic institution could provide him with. But, if one day, that man feels he can expect to have the security of a job, a family, a home, an opportunity, educated children, then that man will be encouraged to defend democracy. On the other hand, the opposition has a strong motivation. Their goal is to establish a new society, which could prove to be a false one such as Nicaragua's and other countries' in Europe, but nevertheless, they are motivated by this idea. It could very well turn out to be a more violent, exploitive, oligarchic, repressive, and totalitarian society. But they believe in it. They have something to struggle for, and this is what we have to teach our soldiers. It is fundamental that our soldiers acquire the motivation that is necessary to accomplish these goals.

### ***Insurgent War against the People***

**General Adolfo Blandón**—At one time we allowed 400 crippled subversives to return to the Communist countries to

General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.



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Seven years of conflict and the devastation of the 1986 earthquake reduced parts of the countryside and San Salvador to rubble.

receive proper medical attention. Do you know what it meant for a group of guerrilla terrorists to go around carrying 400 crippled men? Their mobilization capabilities were reduced, and they had to be constantly on the go. From the tactical point of view it was a tremendous burden. We, as military men, know that. However, we have realized that in this type of war there needs to be some degree of reasonable action taken. About 15 days ago we freed 98 prisoners at one time, and currently, we are backing the President with respect to an amnesty decree that is being prepared to liberate a certain number of political prisoners. In spite of the fact that we are going through the best times—militarily—the terrorists have managed to disperse into small units and are taking actions against the economy. In my view they are actually taking actions against the people because blowing up electric towers and, thus, leaving certain sectors of the city without energy means that they are affecting the people. To machine-gun a bus carrying innocent civilians and to threaten to kill those who don't obey their orders mean that they

are affecting the people. Those humble people who have to walk to work because their means of transportation have been destroyed are affected by these actions provoked by those who claim to be defending them. They have chosen the wrong path. I consider their actions as desperate attempts to try to regain some control—up to now they have been unable to gain the support of the people. There are three significant occurrences which I will mention to you because I think they are worthy of some consideration. The private enterprise organized a strike against the government due to the war taxes the government wanted to impose on the people.

Yes, the war taxes. As a result, the business sector held a strike. The majority of the people responded favorably, and almost all of the shops were closed, I would say about 98 percent of them in the three principal cities. To me it was a successful civic demonstration, with no violence at all. The country was very quiet that day. The next day everyone returned to their normal activities and businesses reopened. But it was a good civic demonstration. In response to this, the government organized a demonstration with their party and gathered some 50,000 people and walked through the streets of San Salvador. It was also a civic demonstration—without violence, without graffiti, without vandalism, without breaking windows, without burning tires, without beating anybody. Two days later, the Communists held demonstrations at which only 250 people attended. That meant a significant defeat for them.

Now they have changed their strategy and are fighting an armed war in the rural areas. They will never win that way. They are also trying to take advantage of the economic, political, and social problems in the country in order to infiltrate into the syndicates [labor unions]. They are capitalizing on those problems such as unemployment and the effects of inflation on the humble and poverty stricken people. They have been moving the *masas* in order to materialize a plan they have created called the "Final Strategic Offensive." The basis of this plan is to create chaos and disorder in the capital, to accuse the government of incompetence, to foment violent manifestations in order to create a state of mistrust and insecurity among the



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**In 1987, Colonel Montano attended this civic action project. Such joint military and community efforts have been credited with improving public perceptions.**

population. So they can start to question, "Well, what is going on here?" They try to provoke the security groups and other authority figures by touching their buttocks, spitting in their faces, etc. Up to now, the security forces have behaved professionally and have put up with the abuses they've encountered. They are making a tremendous effort not to react violently.

Thus, their attempt to cause someone to be killed in the streets has not succeeded. They think that the day the first person is shot we will stop receiving international support, and our international image will be disgraced. That is their primary objective. There is one important thing, though, that has occurred during these last few weeks where they have demonstrated daily with 20, 30, 40 people. That is, that the demonstrations have been aggressive and they have used huge



clubs with nails stuck on the end. There was a problem at the Social Security Institute, where several people were wounded, including two TV photographers. A lieutenant was in command on the police contingency. They surrounded him. That lieutenant suffered a severe blow on his head. They hit him in the head with one of those nailed clubs and smashed his skull. When the doctor operated he discovered a coagulum which almost killed him. There was another policeman who was in a state of shock in the military hospital. He was tied to his bed because he was suffering from severe convulsions as a result of being struck on the head.

They had no other choice but to shoot at the ceiling. As a result, several splinters fell on the civilians, causing multiple injuries. The two photographers were among the victims.

The subversives are constantly trying to instigate violence and create more violence because it is not convenient for them that there be elections. They are trying to make President Duarte resign. If there are no elections, the democratic process will be destroyed. They know that the elections for deputy and the elections for a new president will only strengthen democracy in El Salvador and will undoubtedly strengthen those democracies elsewhere in Central America. It will also affect the Sandinista regime. So, as you can see, it is all coordinated. They have created a strategic plan that, in my opinion, will try and bring down Duarte's government. But we have been very clear. We have said that we do not defend any political party. We defend the President of the Republic because that is what has been decreed by the political constitution. They have wanted to involve us in political actions. They have tried to instigate a coup but have not succeeded, a very different situation to that one faced eight or nine years ago.

### ***Their Plan Will Backfire***

***Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova Vejar***—I would say that the subversion has practically lost its military capacity. That's

Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova Vejar, former Second Brigade Commander and now Director of the Military Academy, interviewed in Santa Ana and San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987 and 23 July 1987, respectively.



DONEHOO

**Haircut Day.** The San Vicente 5th Battalion provides haircuts as part of a local civic action effort.

why they designed the plan they referred to as a strategic counteroffensive. That plan, just the name of it, suggests that they are acting on the defensive and that they are planning to retake the initiative they have lost, that is, strategically speaking. But, we can truly see that, out of all the demonstrations they have made up to this point, they haven't been able to do more. They have managed to incorporate very few followers—who have only made a lot of noise, vandalized, publicly provoked the local authorities for the purpose of producing a radicalization and, as a result of the wounded or dead, producing a radicalization of the population in their favor and against us. But, truly, it has failed for them completely. I think we'll be seeing less of those movements.

The real purpose, as I was saying, is to produce a radicalization. First, prepare an unfavorable political ambience

and at the same time gather supporters. At the same time the guerrillas radicalize the population, it is interesting to observe how they go about establishing a platform to justify their existence and actions. The government has recognized that the salaries have decreased. This is due to a devaluation and an increase in the cost of living as a result of the war which has been provoked by the insurgents. Once they have established this platform, they then try to incorporate more people into their movements by saying, "... we are solidly behind the employees of ANDA [governmental water authority], with those of the university in their struggle...." Fortunately, they haven't been successful. I think, though, that what they would have preferred is more dead people as a result of these demonstrations because then their *compañeros* could say, "Listen, the only thing we asked for is that you increase our salaries. Instead, one of ours has been killed. You killed this guy, who was such a nice person. The only thing we can do to combat your repressive regime is to take up arms."

*They were successful at one point because one of their leaders had been shot. But now, at this point, I think that this situation is almost terminated. I think that by now, according to their planning, they should have already stirred up a bubbling cauldron a thousand times greater than the one diminishing now.*

It came to the point where we thought the situation was going to worsen. The labor agitation has decreased once again. Or, at least, if the labor agitation has not ceased, it no longer has the characteristics it had principally during the month of June. And this is because the population itself, with the actions they've undertaken, have realized who the people are who are truly promoting all of this. That is another example of the rejection of Marxism. I think, the people realize that the Marxists are behind all of this. And, even when they are expecting to have material improvements, of a pecuniary type, they have not wanted to be incorporated. Not even as a result of the success in the agitation of the *masas* they have tried to obtain and in some of the terrorist actions that are practically controlled at this moment. I think that this maneuver, this



DONEHOO

In San Vicente, Medical Battalion members provide on-the-spot dentistry, pulling teeth as part of a combined military and community civic action project.

counteroffensive as planned by the terrorists, will constitute a failure. Besides being a military failure, it will also fail to motivate the *masas* and will inevitably produce a total alienation of the subversion on the part of the population. As I understand it, their plan will backfire.

### ***Guerrilla Strategy Has Changed during My Presidency***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—There has been a change in the guerrilla strategy during my presidency. The series of free elections has influenced the people's attitude toward the government, undermining the guerrillas' call for violent

José Napoleón Duarte (President of El Salvador, 1984 to present), *Duarte: My Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), pp. 273, 275-77, 279. Copyright 1986 by José Napoleón Duarte. Reprinted by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

revolution. The greatest setback to the FMLN, according to defectors, was the peace talks in La Palma. The popular response to my call for peace was overwhelming. The FMLN saw that they were being pushed to a bargaining table where they did not have the advantage.

This was why their military strategist, Villalobos, criticized Cienfuegos after the talks. This is why at Ayagualo they took a hard line—all or nothing, with emphasis on our differences. Villalobos has taken the FMLN back to the strategy of Cayetano Carpio—Prolonged People's War. The guerrillas will avoid direct clashes, work on building cadres for the next five or ten years, and use terrorism in the cities to destabilize the government.

Their tactics have been designed to reduce the space for dialogue, but publicly they must continue to call for negotiations. The concept of peace talks has too much support in El Salvador and abroad for the guerrillas to reject them openly. Their actions—such as kidnapping of my daughter and the mayors—simply sabotage the chances for talks.

The guerrillas [also] use the strategy of economic destruction, without regard to who suffers. They blow up bridges, destroy power lines, burn buses and trucks. The poor are the ones left in the dark and stranded without transportation, while the rich live in Miami. The guerrillas plant mines in roads and footpaths. Many children and farm workers have been killed or crippled by these mines, as have soldiers. The guerrillas have even planted mines in the public park in Santa Tecla, just because the police cadets would exercise in the park some mornings. The risk to the hundreds of children who played in the same park did not concern the terrorists. Their object is to inspire fear in everyone.

Salvadorans are tired of living in fear. . . . The guerrilla claims are inconsistent with their actions. They have shown little humanity. Terrorism is inhumane because its proponents assert that their political end justifies any means, no matter how many innocent people suffer. The fear created is meant to bring change, but terror will only engender more violence. Humanitarian concern must come first before any bridges can be built over the political differences dividing us.



COPREFA

This 1986 photograph of soldiers providing assistance is well-known in El Salvador. The government promotes it and a changed image, saying the military are part of the solution now, not part of the problem.

There will be no common ground as long as the guerrillas believe violence is the only way they can gain power. There are opportunities for all political beliefs within the democratic system. The working class can organize to gain power within a democracy. But the guerrillas, who claim to represent the workers, seem more interested in attacking the economy and the Army than trying to change the unjust structure of our society. During the negotiations in Panama for the release of my daughter and the mayors, the FMLN leader Mario Aguiñada told my representative outright, "We cannot permit the democratic process to be a success in El Salvador."

Why? If we can demonstrate that a democratic system can bring about structural changes peacefully, then the choice between domination by the Rightist oligarchy and violent revolution by the Left will no longer be a valid options. The new option for Central America and other countries would be

the democratic revolution. El Salvador is creating this model, while Nicaragua represents the leftist choice.

### ***Nobody Wins without the Support of the People***

**General Adolfo O. Blandón**—We had planned to take the plan, "United to Reconstruct," throughout the 14 departments of the Republic. The objective was to try to supply, try to help, the rural people where they needed it most—undoubtedly, they have suffered most as a result of this war. For this we needed a concurrence of the government ministries. The President appointed me as general coordinator of the campaign, and he appointed a representative of the government to assist me at that level. I should mention that not all the ministries of the government cooperated in a way we would have liked them to. Instead, you had some who did a lot, others who did very little, and others who did nothing. However, even with that, the effort has been huge. We believed we were going to terminate the effort at the end of 1986. There were originally some 500 tasks throughout all the national territory, and we ended up with more than 900. To this date, I believe that, without having made a detailed count of it, we have performed some 1,200 tasks throughout all the national territory. I should be clear, and I should also tell you that in the economic effort, the United States has helped tremendously through AID—through the provision of materials and the economic means in order to reconstruct. What we were trying to demonstrate to the people, was that the armed forces were proposing a strategy for reconstruction rather than destruction. On the other hand, with the terrorists it was contrary—destruction and more destruction. They destroy the infrastructure, and we on the other hand try to reconstruct what has been destroyed.

General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.

I believe that the campaign, "United to Reconstruct," has been the most effective campaign to benefit the people within the last 10 years in this country. We are thinking of continuing to implement it more for this year because, as the plan itself states, "it's like a drop of oil that expands itself." We have begun in a small nucleus, practically in the vicinities of the departmental headquarters, and we want it to continue extending towards the peripheral areas of the departments. Therefore, at the end of 1988, the campaign, "United to Reconstruct," would have stretched throughout the entire national territory.

It is a very ambitious plan. It is a plan that has a great deal of human feeling, a great deal of human sensitivity, and it is for that reason that the terrorists have attacked with fury. They have even made pamphlets. They have written in international magazines. They have talked in Europe against the campaign, "United to Reconstruct," and it is simply because the campaign takes away their support of the people. Nobody can win this type of war without the support of the civilian population. That is our campaign, to win the minds and the hearts of all the people in favor of democracy.

### ***We Won't Be Able to Terminate This War Completely***

**Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya**—Every war brings its casualties, and the only one which doesn't have casualties is one which doesn't have combat. Every combatant will suffer casualties during a war of this type. This is not a normal conflict. It is an irregular conflict, and it is not a low-intensity conflict as it may appear to some. It is of great intensity. The only thing that we don't do is combat with nuclear weapons or toxic gases, and that is why it may be referred to as a low-intensity conflict. But the bullets are the same as anywhere else, and they kill just as effectively. We do claim it is a

Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987.



high-intensity war because we are feeling it, we are living it. And perhaps its classification derives from the fact that a war which does not employ nuclear weapons is a low-intensity conflict. But the conflicts are of high intensity like in any other part of the world where an irregular war is being fought. I claim it is of high intensity because all of the sectors of a country are involved. The merchants suffer, the transport industry suffers, the owners of companies suffer, the ordinary salesperson suffers, the market saleswoman suffers, the farmer suffers, the poor people suffer, the rich people suffer. And the armed forces suffer.

You can see why I claim this to be a high-intensity war, because all of the sectors of a country, all of the population are involved one way or the other. All the forces of a country and its people are involved in this struggle, not just a few. One example includes a student who goes to school to become educated, and all of a sudden he is killed as a result of a confrontation between two forces. He wasn't even directly involved in the struggle, neither from one side nor the other. He simply became involved due to the fact that he was living in a country that is undergoing subversive warfare. I have lived the intensity of this war in the three different places I've been. I know that the subversives are scattered throughout the entire country. They know what they are doing and where they are doing it. They have analyzed all of the territory. They have analyzed the causes. And unfortunately for us, like any other underdeveloped country, we will always have to motivate the people and give them reasons why they must continue to pursue this struggle. We don't believe we will be able to terminate this war completely. But we do believe, and we know, and we are conscious of the fact that we are going to win it. We will win this war with the help of other countries who wish to help us. But we also want the countries who are helping us to understand our actions, to understand what we are doing and why. We want them to understand our idiosyncracies. We want them to feel what we feel but in a sincere and real way just as we project it.

## ***Insurgent Leadership: The Next Center of Gravity***

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**—Talking to the end game. What do you do? I would argue that militarily (and I know that this isn't very popular) what you do is continue to do exactly what we are doing, you just do it better. That is not very dramatic, but I really do think that the Salvadorans are militarily fighting this war the way it needs to be fought. They are out and about, broken down into small units, going after these guys night and day. They just aren't doing it as well as they need to. That's what we have to fight, how to make that happen. The business of talks or the business of retraining programs and that sort of thing are all ongoing efforts. That is what the Mil Group gets paid to do, and that is what we are working at.

One other thing, if you want to close this thing out, you target the FMLN leadership more directly, more specifically, than we have. It is the one way that you can fundamentally alter the equation. If we kill Villalobos or if we kill Shafik Handal or if we kill Leonel, they will be replaced—but they won't really be replaced. Villalobos has been out there since 1971 or 1972, and Shafik before him. They are, in many people's eyes, the revolution, if you will. The FMLN would have a very, very difficult time replacing them if they were gone. Yet, to my knowledge, we haven't done a very good job of going after them. To wit, I said, "I want pictures of those guys. I want to see who these people are that we are going after." I couldn't get those pictures from the *Estado Mayor*. I had to go to the U.S. intelligence community to get those pictures. Well, if that is the case, it's kind of hard to argue that we really are targeting those guys or focusing against them to any extent.

They are a center of gravity. It ought to be like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Every time they turn around, they ought to feel somebody breathing down their necks.

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

Now, going back to the Malayan experience. One of the things they did was issue rewards. If they had a picture, they put out a little piece of paper and had the guy's picture and his name, and they said, "We will give you so many thousands of dollars for information leading to the arrest or demise of this no good SOB." We haven't done that. I am not sure why. I think that, one, you might get him, but two, you would sure make him nervous about, "Why is that guy looking at me so funny from across the campfire?" I think we must do more in that area.

There is some talk on the part of the Salvadorans about doing more, but they haven't yet, and that's one of those things which could make a difference.

### ***To Win, We Need a Long-Term American Commitment***

**General John R. Galvin**—If there is something that is difficult, it is the tendency of the U.S. Congress to assume the role of the Executive and to carry out foreign policy by making laws almost on an ad hoc basis or by using congressional influence to, in effect, be the operator rather than providing long-term guidance. By that I mean, we found ourselves at times having to go back to Congress to get, say, two helicopters to replace two disabled helicopters in the Salvadoran armed forces.

I think when Congress is making decisions about individual helicopters, you have reached the point where Congress is presuming to do what the Executive Branch should do. That's my opinion. However, I did not feel strapped by U.S. law. I think U.S. law was basically supportive of what we were doing in Latin America.

The other problem was that what we were doing costs money, and the money comes out of the pockets of American

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

tax payers. Congress looks very hard at that kind of expenditure and wants to see success; it wants to see profit for the money invested. There's nothing wrong with that except that the congressional approach is short term. It's not long term. The congressman wants to see something now, like next month or before the end of this year, and many times we're talking about something that can't be resolved in that short time frame. The greatest success that democracy has had in fighting an insurgency was Malaya. And Malaya took 14 years. It is almost impossible, if not totally impossible, to talk to Congress about a war in El Salvador that is going to last several years, even five years.

The congressman wants to know how we can win this war within a year or two years. There is a great temptation on the part of the people in the State Department and the Defense Department to go along with that. To say, "Well, I'll have to say we can be much better off within the next two or three years, or Congress will just leave me out in the cold."

I think that we have to face the hard facts, and we have to say this is going to be a war that will go 10 years. It might go 15 years, but it can be won. Then we have to get American commitment to that, American willingness to sacrifice—the way we sacrificed to rebuild Europe as a democratic region after WWII.

I don't think it's a matter of learning it. I think we all know it. The question is are we willing to face it. I found that when I talked to senators and representatives, they would say to me, "Look, I understand the problem, but we have farmers out in the Middle West who are losing their farms, and we have a budget that is looking very bad, and we have many other problems, and we simply can't deal with that problem in the way you would like to see it resolved." In other words they have higher priorities, and they don't have a lot of time to spend thinking about El Salvador because they are thinking about Pocatello or some place else. It's difficult to convince people that in the long run democracy will survive only if we are willing to sacrifice in our own hemisphere.

## ***This Is a Doubly Dangerous Phenomenon***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—United States' ability to respond to a problem in the hemisphere is not a measurement of military capability but, rather, of political will. As I've said, I think our political will is transitory, abrupt, subject to radical changes in direction, and driven episodically by perceptions of the moment concerning the level of threat to the United States. This phenomenon is dangerous in itself, obviously. But also, a clever enemy can continue to build his capabilities against the United States as long as he stays below the tolerance threshold of the American body politic, and if he is clever enough, he can stay below the threshold on multiple fronts, until he can combine those capabilities and confront us with an aggregation of force that is formidable.

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.



## *Preparation for the Future*

### *Warm-Up for the Future*

**General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova**—We face some very difficult times. I think these last six years have been more like warm-up sessions for what we really have to face, but I have a lot of faith in the people of this country, and with some effort, we will be able to survive. There is a strong, professional armed forces with the capability to resist heavy blows in the future, and I don't think that attacking the national economy or carrying out heavy assaults against various installations every six months will enable the subversives to be successful. I hope one day the subversives will realize the extreme damage they are causing to the Salvadoran people. But mainly, they must understand that they have a political option in which, given the circumstances that the people might support them one day, they could attain power and control as military men.

General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987.

## ***Seizing the Moral High Ground***

**Colonel James J. Steele**—Another related and important aspect of this is the host country's willingness and ability to pursue the war. When I first arrived here I got the distinct feeling, particularly in talking to some of the middle class and above, that there was this feeling that it really doesn't matter how well the Salvadorans do because the United States will come and save the day. The United States is not going to let this place go down the drain. You don't hear that anymore. There's a realization that the United States is not going to send the Marines. The Salvadoran military has always wanted to fight this war themselves. They want to win it themselves. So, the point about the nationalistic view of things is on target. To me, you undermine the long-term effort if you try to superimpose your own military forces and solve the problem yourself. Maybe if you look at a case of Grenada or other places where you're dealing with a hostile government, you have to make a decision to do that. That's fine but the ideal solution is to have them win the war themselves, and you provide them with material support, advice, training, or whatever. That, I think, in the long term, is the way you build your image in the region, and you develop the capability which allows you to not stay there forever. It also enhances their own legitimacy and professional image clearly.

They've pursued their own war in a way that, although it hasn't been fully successful, it has had a lot of success. So they see themselves in a lot of ways as more expert in this than we.

They've done as well as they've done because they, very early on, recognized that even though they wanted our help, they wanted to fight this war themselves and be successful. They have done as well as they have because they've recognized that legitimacy was an important part of it. Democracy was an important part of it. Supporting those principles was certainly key to external support from us but also to developing a support base from within the country.

Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5-10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

Certainly, by electing a president through democratic means, they seized the moral high ground. The guerrillas can say what they want, but it's pretty hard to discredit.

## *Securing the High Ground*

**Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya**—One specific lesson we have learned from all of this is that every government, at any time, has to look out for its people. It has to look out for the welfare of its people and never forget that in our societies, as well as any other society in this world, there will always exist a difference of classes. We cannot deny this. There will always exist natural rights, political rights, social rights, to which an individual is entitled, and the government is responsible in looking out to see that these rights are not violated. But this country also has to require the individual who is demanding these rights to fulfill his/her responsibilities as a citizen. That is probably one of the things that we have lacked—to make our people understand that the same way in which they claim their rights from the government, the same way the government can claim rights from its people.

And we believe that no where in this world is a government capable of maintaining the stability of a country unless its people contribute to helping the government maintain that stability. A government becomes the administrator of a state in which all the goods and benefits are derived from the habitants of that state. At the same time we accomplish this, we want to make other underdeveloped countries like our's see that we can function better. That is one lesson we can learn. A government should never overlook nor neglect the natural, social, and political rights of its people. But the government must demand certain responsibilities in return for those rights that have been granted.

Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987.



Another lesson is that many times we want to attack social conditions. Poor social conditions exist anywhere in the world. You can go to Europe, the United States, South America, and you will find poverty. Unfortunately, our underdeveloped countries lack the capacity for industrialization and, thus, improving the quality of living conditions of our people. However, poverty will continue to exist unless we educate our people. That is, education is fundamental, in order to prevent certain conditions brought on by a subversive war to dominate a people. The more educated a person may be, the less vulnerable he/she is to Communist flagellation.

Another important factor I mentioned before is the honesty in an administration. It serves no purpose to imitate other countries economically if we aren't able to maintain certain restrictions as required by law. The laws have been established firmly in our country. But, unfortunately, the interpretation of laws is based on human interpretation, and humans are known to interpret the laws on their own behalf. So, no matter how good a law may be, it may always be mocked. You can add to that deficiencies that exist in the judicial system. For example, the United States has very strict laws, and the people know that if they violate them they will receive the proper punishment. In countries like ours, for example, a sanction may be approved, but because of the ways in which people interpret the laws on their own behalf, the verdict on the part of a jury may be subject to change. The structure of the subversive forces, which sometimes threatens and exercises terrorist tactics, can also affect honest consequences for the application of justice. Many times a judge would like to see justice done, but he fears for his life.

### ***Maintaining the High Ground***

**General Adolfo Blandón**—I believe that from a political-military point of view, we have only one future. And that future

General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.

is based on creating a conscience in national unity. We can talk about democracy, we can talk about liberty, we can talk about justice. But when we see that our interests—whether personal or political—are in some kind of danger, that is a different story.

During these difficult times we are living, we should all speak a common language, those of us who are truly democrats or those of us who truly want a democratic system instituted. We should make greater efforts to place our country's interests before our personal interests or those of a particular party. The upcoming elections should serve as an example of an honest political campaign, a civic campaign, rather than one in which insults and accusations about corruption would be suggested.

We have always been accused of corruption. That person says we are corrupt, the other accuses the government of being corrupt, the whole world accuses us of being corrupt. But nobody accuses the terrorists of being corrupt. They are never accused of anything.

We came up with a plan called Unidos Para Reconstruir, which was based on the unification of all sectors to support the goals for peace. Its specific objectives focused on solving the people's problems and restoring those basic needs that they lost during the course of the war. Our main objective was to get closer to the public by working on public benefits. We repaired schools, churches, the potable water system, telephone services, roads, and bridges.

The President of the Republic named me as general coordinator of the plan, and I personally spoke with all of the sectors. I spoke with the church, the political parties, with the contractors and managers, the students, the professors, the agriculturists, etc. I delivered the same message everywhere I went—We need to unite in order to attain peace. We cannot allow ourselves to separate from each other. I used to say that, in this country, if the armed forces would take your example, we wouldn't be in this predicament nor would we be here listening to what I have to say. Luckily, those who understood the true meaning behind the effort to pursue the democratic process were the armed forces. I think the church came in second place. But we understood it far better than anyone else.

and we are struggling to maintain and sustain the process because we know that the only way to live is in a pluralist democracy.

In that sense, we must all struggle together, including you [the United States], to unite with the armed forces. Those managers and contractors who are at a constant difference with the President of the Republic should try and seek a common ground with which to patch up their differences. They must think that if we lose, we will lose it all. For example, if the Communists take over, they won't allow you to run your TV channels freely. It will belong to the state, to the government. Or, if you happen to own the station, a series of restrictions and limitations will be imposed on you which will consequently lead you to turn it into the state. I don't want to call on the newspaper owners and ask them to write pretty things about us. No! I want them to criticize us on those things we deserve to be criticized on. But I also want them to praise us on those issues we deserve to be praised on. It won't pay in the end to make that much propaganda for the subversion, because the time may come when you won't be allowed to express your thoughts and feelings on an issue as freely as you've done under a democracy. Those are the basics for the plan *Unidos Para Reconstruir*.

### ***Democratization, Human Rights, and the Will to Win***

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**—We talked about this the other night, to quote General Blandón, "There is not the slightest possibility that the FMLN can hope to gain political power in El Salvador through force of arms." I think that is a fair statement. But why? There were some really very, very scary moments in our experience, but one very key, key element is just the fact that the armed forces have made up their minds that they are not

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

going to lose; they are not going to Miami. They are here for the duration. This is their country, and whether the Gringos come or go, they are not going to lose. The old will of the commander (if you will), forcing his will on his troops and on the enemy. You talk to these folks. They just are not going to lose. That counts for a lot. If you go back to the final offensive, we had supposedly reinitiated our aid program back in the October-November time frame, but none of it had shown up.

They had units that ran out of ammunition during the final offensive, but these folks just, flat, were not going to lose. And that spirit, as imperfect as we are, as many things as we do poorly, and as many things as we need to do better, that spirit is terribly important—intangible but important.

A second point that's closely related to the first is the quality of the Salvadoran soldier or the quality of the Salvadoran as a soldier. These are good soldiers. These are fighters. You might bloody their noses today. But they will pick up their rucks [back packs]. They will pick up their weapons. And they will go back out there the next day. They are not afraid of a fight, and if they make contact, they aren't looking for an excuse to break contact. The basic product, the fundamental product, is there. This is a soldier, and this is an institution that you can commit resources to, and you are not throwing them down a bottomless pit, because there is something there—there is a soldier, and it is a soldier who is committed to the proposition that he is not going to lose. He may not be committed to doing it your way or my way or as quickly as we would want, but he is not going to lose, and he is not afraid of a fight. Very, very important.

The other point is that the armed forces and the government, the country as whole, have made tremendous strides in terms of democratization and human rights. That is not just puff—not just pretty words. It has had a real concrete impact. It has taken away the reason for the insurgency. They did have elections for a Constituent Assembly in 1982, and they did have presidential elections in '84, and they did have National Assembly elections in '85, and they are getting ready to go through that process

again. Now when you go out and talk to people, you honestly do hear them complain, but they complain about, "my president" or "my government," as it should be in a democracy. There is a growing awareness of the fact that there is an alternative to taking up a weapon and going up into the mountains to change things. There is, in fact, a functioning democracy here, imperfect, but it is a functioning democracy. If you want to throw rocks at the government, you are authorized to do that. Read any newspaper any day, and you will see some of the strongest, most emotional attacks on the government that you will see anywhere. Not always fun to read, but again, it's there. That's important.

The human rights dimension: When you talk to the Embassy folks, they will tell you that in 1980-81 we were killing 800 people a month—political killings. That is not a hard figure, but that is the best guess, the best estimate. Eight hundred political killings a month. That does not include combat losses or include civilian combat losses. Most of those 800 being the work of your right-wing extremists. In 1986, and continuing into 1987, the average is 22 a month. That is still 22 too many, but there is a whale of a difference between 800 and 22. And whereas in 1981 the majority were the result of the right wing, the clear evidence is now that the majority of that 22 is a result of Left or guerrilla assassinations. Again, you have undercut the reason for the insurgency.

You have those folks [insurgents] that are hard core committed people. They burn their bridges, and they are not coming in. But in terms of their recruiting and their building up the popular mass support that they are looking for—and that's a part of their strategy—that mass movement, that mass uprising, is hard to get. Democracy, as a matter of fact, works. In terms of explaining why they haven't lost or why they have done as well as they have, just look at the strides that they've made in this democratization and improved human rights. I think that that accounts for it to a significant extent.

## ***The Salvadoran Report Card***

**Ambassador Edwin G. Corr**—The five areas that we address from the point of view of the U.S. Government are human rights, the consolidation of democracy, the search for peace, the economy, and Salvador's role in Central America. Tremendous progress has been made in human rights. We look at human rights in three areas. We look at human rights in terms of reducing the number of violations. In this, the progress, in an historical time sense, has been phenomenal. We also look at the efforts of the Salvadorans to improve their justice system. In this, they are only just beginning. A National Advisory Commission has been examining their penal and other codes and their procedures for the administration of justice for about two years. After a very intensive and broad effort, encompassing many people, they are just now beginning to make suggestions that will be enacted into law. That should help to improve their justice system. In terms of the time required to clean up and restructure the Salvadoran justice system, they also are getting off to a good start.

There is a third area under human rights which involves the prosecution of human rights offenders, and, unfortunately, there are still critical cases that have not been resolved. And there has been a very great difficulty in reaching a judgment or a sentencing or a conviction of people who were allegedly involved in notorious human rights cases, such as the Sheraton case or the Romero case.

As I project into the future, I believe that there will continue to be a lessening of violations. Although tremendous progress has been made in human rights, there are now and then dangerous blips and setbacks on the screen that we have to be aware of, but I believe that progress will be maintained. I think the comportment of the armed forces and of the public security forces will continue to improve. I believe that we will continue

Ambassador Edwin G. Corr, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1985 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 1 June 1987 and 24 September 1987.

to see progress, but we must understand that it will take a long time to redo adequately the justice system. That is something that will require a decade or so even though there is a good start. And, I also believe that if the high command of the armed forces continues determined to let justice be served and not to obstruct it and if the governments that follow Duarte's persist in a commitment to achieve a just judicial system, that precedent will be established in which no persons or sectors of society will be immune from prosecution.

The second area of importance that the Embassy tries to promote is the consolidation of democracy. Again, the country has come a long way! In terms of institutionalization, El Salvador has held a constitutional convention. It already has elected two different sets of congressional members and is getting ready to elect a third group of congressmen and mayors. El Salvador has elected one president and is preparing for the election of another. The Supreme Court has begun to establish the practice of judicial review, and, equally important, the Executive has complied with its rulings. I believe that the practice of judicial review will probably continue.

As important as institutional measures are in consolidating democracy, attitudinal changes are perhaps more important. The most important attitudinal change, on which there has been tremendous progress, is acceptance of the idea that military authorities are subordinate to civilian control within the framework of the constitution. I believe the armed forces have shown over the last five or six years a willingness, a desire, to be submissive to civilian authority. I, nevertheless, think that it will probably require as many as three more presidential elections to be certain the concept has been fully established. This length of time would permit an entire generation of officers to grow up from lieutenant through retirement under this concept. This would be enough time to get this concept deeply imbedded into the psyche, attitudes, and values of the armed forces officer corps. Tremendous progress has been made, but military submission will have to continue for some time before we can be confident the change is lasting.

In fact, the danger of a coup may become greater when the war is over than it is now. Because the armed forces are occupied with fighting a war, they presently are very patriotic, loyal to their country, busy protecting national territory, and are actually justifying their title of guardians of the republic. It may be that once the war is over the political problems of a large military establishment could become acute. The country just cannot support in peacetime the size military establishment it has now. Once the regional situation of an expansionist Marxist/Leninist regime in Nicaragua is resolved, and once the Salvadoran internal situation is put into order, it makes sense to reduce the armed forces.

It will take great wisdom and skillful management by the civilian authorities and by the military officer corps to go through a demobilization. It has always been my opinion, having observed Latin America for a number of years, that Latin American military establishments are most dangerous when their budgets and officers' perks are being reduced. The period of demobilization will be a critical period.

I believe there has been tremendous progress made institutionally and attitudinally in moving forward to a self-sustaining democracy. It will still probably be another decade before we can state that El Salvador has definitely arrived. The country is moving in the right direction. Liberty, freedom, and democracy are something that each generation and each administration of government has to continue assuring. El Salvador is on the right track, and we can be proud that we are supporting those Salvadorans, civilian and military, who are committed to constitutional democracy.

If we look at the matter of the quest for peace, I also divide this into two segments. One is the conduct of the war and the other is national reconciliation. I use the word reconciliation and not the words dialogue or negotiation because I believe that the government and armed forces have been seeking to reconcile the armed opposition, from the level of single individuals in groups to the entire FMLN/FDR, and to bring them into the mainstream, into the political process within the constitutional framework. They have done this through bringing individuals



back into society when they defect or desert, having decided that the guerrillas cause is no longer needed nor worthy. Secondly, small groups have begun to come in. We see now, as we get ready to go into another one of these dialogues (the third round of talks between the government and FMLN-FDR), that perhaps more groups will split off and maybe eventually bring in the whole FDR and maybe even the FMLN. At the same time, I am not too sanguine that this will happen rapidly. But, I do believe that there will continue to be a splitting off. The maximum number of full-time guerrilla combatants may have been as high as 12,000; it is now down to 5,000 to 6,000, and I think that reduction will continue. That is the reconciliation that I am talking about. Eventually the guerrillas will negotiate and be renegotiated into society, or they will be marginalized and finally eliminated.

With respect to the war, the armed forces have gone from a period, as is so graphically demonstrated by portions of your book, in which they had to confront battalion-size units to the superior military position they enjoy today. They were threatened by defeat in the guerrilla's declared "final offensive" in San Salvador in January 1981. From 1981 until the beginning of 1984, the armed forces confronted battalion-size units and at times were defeated in battles. They have now reduced the number of guerrilla combatants. The FMLN has had to break down into small units and disperse. And the guerrillas are always on the move to escape defeat. No one believes that the guerrillas have a chance of winning the war.

I often make a comparison of El Salvador with other cases where countries have dealt with insurgencies, such as Uruguay, Argentina, the Philippines, Colombia, Algeria, and Greece. The case, to me, which is most pertinent to El Salvador for comparison is the Malaysian case. Depending on how one measures, eliminating the guerrillas in Malaysia took 14 years, although the last 4 years are characterized as a "mopping up" and were not nearly as intensive as the first 10. We are now in the eighth year of conflict here. I believe that the guerrillas in El Salvador have had more favorable conditions to win than the guerrillas enjoyed in Malaysia. Salvadoran guerrillas have a

sanctuary. They have the support of the Nicaraguans, Cubans, and Soviets in materiel, training, and diplomacy. In Malaysia many of the guerrillas were of different ethnic and racial stock, and the rest of the Malaysians were more easily united against them.

Despite the advantages the FMLN-FDR has had, I believe that within a couple more years the democratic society, the government, and the armed forces will have broken the backbone of the guerrillas and that the nation will continue to keep the pressure on. Every stage of guerrilla warfare is critical, however, and care must be taken to prevent retrogression. If the mopping-up stage is not done correctly in all of its aspects—military, social, developmental—the insurgency could go back to a higher level. But I believe that the government is on the right path and that either there will be a reconciliation or the government and the armed forces will eventually grind down the FMLN, marginalize them, and finally eliminate them over the next five, six years.

With respect to the economy, I believe that this country has a greater opportunity to replicate the successful Singaporean, Taiwanese, Korean, or Hong Kong type models of economic growth than any other Latin American country. Salvador has a dense population; it is a small country. Salvadorans are very hard working; they are aggressive. The civil war going on here and the way the Salvadorans persist and endure show certain characteristics—energy, hard work, commitment—that if channeled into constructive economic activity could contribute greatly to development here. I believe that if this country could just get its act together it could address those three areas that we always talk about in the economy: production, generation of employment, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Production, because I think there are exceptional human resources here, even though material resources are limited. Salvadorans are very good entrepreneurs, and if we could create the environment, laws, incentives, and disincentives and that minimum amount of consensus on an economic model, I think that this country could really move out in terms of production—relative to its neighbors and many other developing countries.

I also believe that we have to look at generating employment, and that is a very difficult thing to do. We have to help the Salvadorans generate a lot of jobs and at the same time bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth. They have a good chance to do so. They have the traits that can permit success in this area. It is going to take leadership, and it will take a greater sense of reconciliation, getting rid of some of the hatreds and resentments that are left over from this very strifeful period in their history. If they want it, it is there for them to have. We want to help them in this effort. I hope that they will pull it together.

With respect to El Salvador's role in the region, no country in this region, in my opinion, has been stronger vis-a-vis Nicaragua than the Salvadoran government—to be precise, the government of President Duarte. We are hopeful that there will be some success in achieving democracy and peace in all countries of Central America through the Esquipulas Plan. By the time this is published it will probably be well-known whether there has been or has not been success.

In some ways, the key to the future here lies in the United States and not here in the region. It is up to the American people, up to the two political parties of the United States Congress, up to the United States Executive Branch to come together in a commitment to and support for democracy, peace, and development in the region. As President Duarte says, the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas are fanatically dedicated to a prolonged people's war, particularly in his country but also in the region. President Duarte says he and the democratic forces of his political system are committed to a prolonged strategy for peace. And, what is needed from the United States, he says, is a bipartisan and prolonged commitment to stay as long as necessary and provide the resources essential to make certain that democracy and peace finally are established.

If we, the American people, are willing to make that commitment, patiently and wisely to insist on democratization while respecting the sovereignty of the country and being responsible to the American taxpayer in assuring our assistance is well used, the American foreign policy objectives of denying

Central America to our Communist adversaries, and fomenting peace, democracy, and development for the people of the region and protecting our national security can be attained. Not to do so will be immensely costly to the United States in the medium and long terms.

All five of these areas to which the Embassy gives priority—human rights, the consolidation of democracy, the search for peace, the economy, and Salvador's role in Central America—are interrelated. If there is failure in any one of the five areas there will be failure eventually in the other four. We have to keep working on each of these.

As I look to the future of El Salvador—a small country affected very greatly by external influences, whether one is talking about the price of coffee or Cuban and Sandinista support for the FMLN—I believe there is a reason for optimism. If we can get help to make the external conditions more favorable economically, in terms of having peace and true democracy in the region, the Salvadorans have the ability, the skills, the energy, and entrepreneurial knowledge that could enable them to develop their beautiful country into an increasingly prosperous and harmonious place to live. It is a beautiful country made of nice and competent people.

## ***No Political Will to Win***

***Colonel (Retired) Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez***—In general terms, I could say that the armed forces of El Salvador have experience, have leadership, have good equipment, good training. But the problem I see—and I'd criticized it personally at the time I retired from the Army—is that political decisions influence negatively in the military actions. I believe that there has been a misunderstanding of the democratic aspect. The armed forces do not want to execute coups d'états or return to the past. I believe the democratic system is the best system. However, we believe

Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez, Fourth Brigade Commander, 1982, 1984 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 October 1987.

that present government policies have not permitted certain advances in the military, partly for fear of political reprisal. The commander of El Paraíso, for example, who relieved me, stopped doing what I was doing for fear he would also be taken out of the country. There is a political jealousy on the part of the government toward the military leaders. In other words, they don't want there to be military leadership, and that is a mistake, because in all wars there is military leadership. The war must be won—it's true, not only militarily—but the military aspect is fundamental. If we have more military victories, the government, as a result, will have more political victories, and there will be more social victories and more economic victories. Saying that wars are not won militarily, in global form, is a mistake made by politicians. That thinking is the root of the problem. The commanders are scared of losing their positions if they do something that goes against the political division.

I have the impression that there is no political will to win the conflict. For me, the matter of sitting down and dialoguing and all those things is not the solution to the conflict in El Salvador. First, we believe we must be stronger militarily. It has always been said that diplomacy is achieved by armies, through ambassadors. An ambassador without military force is nothing. That is the reality of things. During WWII we saw how Hitler's Minister of Foreign Affairs signed treaties favorable to Germany, for fear of the German forces' reprisals. This, I believe, could be applied here as well. If we obtain more military success, it will be much easier to obligate the Marxist guerrillas to dispose of their arms and to incline towards the political way. But if they see that the armed forces are held back, they will easily develop in the military field. Look at the result of so many talks that don't lead to anything. My point of view is that the armed forces have the capability to defeat the guerrillas, perhaps not defeat them 100 percent, but to lead them towards a situation where it makes it easier for the government to force them to put their arms down.

## ***Total National Commitment by El Salvador Is Still Lacking***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—I find El Salvador still seriously lacking in total national commitment to the war. There is still too much of the military effort, not exclusively, but still too much. Until there is a better balance between the military and the other elements of national power, they will not achieve the internal consolidation necessary to declare peace and make peace prevail. I believe they will achieve this. I just wish they were on a damn faster timetable than they appear to be.

## ***A Democracy Based on Voting, Not Weapons***

**General Adolfo O. Blandón**—We are entering a very interesting stage. On the one hand we are making an effort, along with all the other sectors in the country, to support the Government of the Republic in the efforts to achieve peace through the Arias Plan. That means that we must be prepared for any situation that arises all of a sudden, such as, for example, a complete cease-fire or a more or less cease-fire. The armed forces of El Salvador have reached such a great level of professionalism that we are prepared. That does not mean that we are constantly alert to any abnormal situation which could possibly occur. Because we should not forget that we are dealing with Marxists, and we shouldn't forget Paris, nor should we forget about all the other maneuvers that the Communists have signed on the negotiating table and at the moment of the truth they have not fulfilled their commitments. However, as I

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón, Chief of Staff of Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987.

was saying at the beginning, we are reasonable men. We are men of peace, even though we are prepared for war. And even yet, we believe our people deserve peace after more than seven years of war. We want to live in tranquility. And as we were saying, to those who still don't understand, democracy is based on voting and on ideas, not weapons. Understand this situation and incorporate into the democratic process.



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## *The U.S. Role in the Future*

### *Assisting Countries to Fight Their Own Wars Is a Viable Strategy*

**General Fred F. Woerner**—I think the major lesson to be learned is the viability of the U.S. strategy of assisting host countries to fight their own wars of counterinsurgencies, internal consolidations, whatever. That this represents a viable strategy and that we do not have to intervene directly with U.S. military forces or firepower. That is contrarily at the far end of the force option spectrum. The techniques of doing that are not new. They have been ignored. They have led frequently to disaster or defeat. And they are articulated in numerous documents, publications, etc., what I call the tactics of counterinsurgency.

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.



## ***Understanding the Nature of Insurgent War and the Past Failure of Leadership***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—We haven't talked about the several dimensions of the problem yet. We've been talking about the military dimension which in my view is the least important. It's the sine qua non. If you don't have public order and security you can't do the other things. But in the long run the actions that are going to make the difference are the political reform movements, the social improvements, health, sanitation, education, housing, all of that business and economic development. That is another main failing of our government's approach. We don't put the several dimensions together. That's the other big lesson—that it is a multidimensional challenge and you have to respond in the same dimensions. It must be done in a coordinated way, but our organization at strategic and operational level does not allow us to do that. It does at tactical level—the country team. But they're sort of out there, without guidance and support from strategic and operational level. It's a bad failing on our part. I don't think we understand, and we don't put the dimensions together effectively at all. That's a failure of leadership.

## ***U.S. Needs a Pro-Democratic Unified Strategy***

**General John R. Galvin**—First let me state what the U.S. policy should be, in my humble opinion. I believe that the U.S.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

policy is basically anti-Communist. It ought to be, basically, pro-democratic. This is a fight for democracy, a fight for the survival of democracy in the world. That is what we are really into here. We need to realize that, and we need to realize that we, the American people, must make sacrifices if we want to live in a democratic world. We understand how important democracy is, and if we were not opposed by people who would like to destroy democracy, we probably wouldn't have to do anything. But the hard cold facts of life are that we are opposed by people who don't want democracy, who want to substitute something else for it. They want to substitute Marxism-Leninism. That is pure dictatorship and loss of all that we know to mean democracy. But we can't try to simply do away with our opponents. What we have to do is support our friends. So, it has to be the fight for democracy, and it has to be our own willingness to sacrifice by supporting, in whatever form we deem appropriate, the fight for democracy in different parts of the world, definitely in Latin America. That does not necessarily mean that we need to provide U.S. troops on the ground to fight. It means that we need to put money and resources of other kinds, although in the last resort there might be fighting.

I don't find that there is enough recognition of what I've just said. I think that our policy is ad hoc. We live from day to day. We don't look very far down the road to see what's coming, and we don't spend enough time trying to understand Latin America. I think that we come up with our plans for what we might do, without that kind of full understanding. Why is that so? It is because we don't have the organization to understand it. We have ambassadors in the countries, and many, if not all, of these ambassadors are very good. But they are dealing with this question one country at a time. There simply isn't enough of a unified effort of the U.S. administration—the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the other departments and agencies—somehow tied together in order to carry out a unified strategy. The organization is not there and the strategy is not there.

United States foreign policy has to be under the control of the Secretary of State and the State Department has to lead. Now, obviously, the U.S. military will have a military strategy, a worldwide military strategy, but that deals with how to defend the United States against a worldwide threat or any kind of threat. But you see, when you are talking about how to defend the United States, once again you are talking about something that's basically reactive. Now, what we need is a better approach based on the goals of the United States. A better approach to a worldwide strategy, one that is sponsored by the State Department and one which is then supplemented by other organizations—such as the Defense Department.

Obviously, with this kind of strategy you run up against the difficulty [here one could be idealistic and say, we ought to have a strategy, but everybody knows that] that if you had a strategy you would have to express it to everybody, and then people could have a counterstrategy to your strategy. So, I don't mean [by that] that this has to be known in great detail. The thing that has to be stated to the public and to the world is that we understand where we are in the final years of the 20th century—which is a position threatened (democracy threatened) by Marxism-Leninism and by other totalitarian elements. Democracy versus Totalitarianism.

If we want to survive as a democracy, we have to ensure the survival of other democracies in the world. We have to ensure the survival of the idea of democracy. We need to start from that simple basis and build ourselves a strategy. With reference to any given country or region it would be classified. But everybody would understand that this strategy has a basis that would have to be part of a series of administrations in the United States, one after the other. It would have to be the responsibility of, primarily, the State Department to run, and we in the military would support that strategy. That might be different from other military strategies for defense of the country which we would continue to do, such as the Maritime Strategy, the NATO Strategy, etc.

## ***Our Support Policy for Democracy Is at Some Risk***

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**—I do have one final area of significant concern when I look at U.S. policy toward El Salvador in recent years, and that is that our policy of support for democracy is at some risk. Not because of the intentions of Washington policy-makers or the nature of our policy in broad sweep, but because we seem better able to transfer organizational effectiveness from military to military than from civilian to civilian.

The Salvadoran military is significantly transformed. Not only in levels of resources and number of personnel. Numbers make a big difference, as former President Magaña knows better than anybody else. He was the first to spot the fact that the Salvadoran officer corps was big enough now so that not all officers knew all other officers. Therefore, you were getting a process of interrelationships based on abstract rules, which are the bases of any kind of regulation, organizational bureaucracy as opposed to a personal caste or family. What one really has been seeing is an increase in efficiency by the military in the ability to operate, in the ability to organize itself, to transfer resources into rural areas, and so forth.

And while this has happened in the middle of a conflict, the civilian side of the house, the public administration, the political parties, and the like, do have undaunted freedom to operate—to the point that, now, much of the Left has been able to come back in from the cold. Nonetheless, they have not turned that freedom into the kind of discipline, the kind of organization, the kind of ability to bring health, schooling, and transportation to rural areas, for example, that would be commensurate.

The U.S. military has had to operate in El Salvador with this 55-trainer limit. God knows how many hundreds of people

Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Interamerican Affairs, U.S. Department of State. 1977 to date, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

associated with AID have been in El Salvador. My guess is that one of the reasons the military has done somewhat better in transferring attitudes and techniques is that the 55 guys are all hands-on, whereas normally a very small number of AID guys really are hands-on. Most of them are doing paperwork to satisfy Washington requirements.

The fact is that you have to have some hands-on activity and some hands-on involvement. At one level you have to have resources of a material kind, and, unless you are prepared to put money where your mouth is, you are not going to get many people's attention. You also need resources of a human and intellectual kind. You need to have people in-country. You need to identify people in the country, local people, whom you can support. We can do some things on our own, but for most we need others. We need to be in there providing support to the kind of people we want to provide support to. Not allowing, in effect, our enemies to be the ones that are providing support to their friends, while our friends, or people who could be our friends, are left to their own devices.

### ***U.S. Needs a Consistent Method of Forming Strategic Policy***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—I think the National Security Council (NSC) was organized in 1947 for a specific purpose. That it was to become a coordinating, not an operating, agency. It's an indispensable function because each of the departments and agencies headed by a cabinet member is equal to the other. They are all co-equal and they all have their own agendas and they all don't fit together. There has to be someone with sufficient authority over those departments and agencies at working level and at secretarial level to knock heads together in order to define the issues and rationally estimate the problem and come up with sustainable commitments. The NSC has not recently performed that function. They've gone off into the easy

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

side of things, which is operating. The most difficult problem, in my view, is formulating policy. Everybody wants to be a squad leader. Nobody wants to be a policy formulator. We don't know how to do that very well, and the mechanism does not work well to formulate and sensibly coordinate a policy to meet specific challenges. Until the NSC or some other body performs that role effectively, we're going to continue to muck around the way we're doing right now.

In my view it is the NSC that has to perform that coordinating function. They shouldn't be in the operating business. They ought to pay attention to coordinated policy formulation. They have to be organized on a continuing basis for as long as necessary to focus on the war and win it.... Given our existing form of government and believing that you're not going to make any major constitutional changes, the only guy I see who can do that is the Vice-President. We have one; he needs a job. I don't think the President can be expected to do that. The Vice-President must take the cabinet members and knock their heads together to define the issues and take them to the President for final decision. Hopefully, the present investigations in the Senate, the House, the Tower Committee, and so forth will acknowledge that indispensable need for which the NSC was created in 1947—but it is a role which it rarely has played successfully.

### ***Political Will Is the Crucial Element in Determining Commitment***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—We tend to segment our analysis and address threats of the moment rather than the potential of long-term threat. Our willingness, and thus our ability to become directly involved, changes radically because our ability to intervene and at the level of reasonable intervention is not driven by the inherent capabilities of the armed forces but by the

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

political will to employ them. That will has a very short life and changes radically and abruptly. One can look at the last two years, and perhaps even shorter period, of congressional attitudes toward Nicaragua. I'm not even talking about intervention but about the actual advance of support/nonsupport. What emerges are dramatic shifts of attitude which are reflections of political will and which translate into whether there will be support for the commitment of U.S. resources.

### *Let Us Develop Our Own Democracy*

**Colonel (Retired) Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez**—Unfortunately—and this is a criticism of the North American Ambassador, a very personal criticism—I believe the U.S. Ambassador has turned out to be too partial to the government.

I am in agreement that U.S. policy protects the government of El Salvador. But don't overprotect it.... There are other sectors. An ambassador is for everyone. The Ambassador here now ... in this sense, I believe, is very personally biased. It's not meant to be a criticism of the North Americans. It's very different, because I saw Ambassador Hinton, and I saw Ambassador Pickering, who were very good ambassadors, diplomats, and they earned the friendship of everybody. However, the U.S. Embassy's actions today induce violence, allowing the leftists to come and paint the Embassy, and other demonstrations. It induces the conservative sectors themselves to turn anti-U.S. Something very dangerous has begun to happen in the country, not only are the leftists against the United States, but also the conservative sector. That is very dangerous because we are your friends, and you treat us poorly.

We believe there should be no interference in the political aspect of El Salvador. Let us develop our own democracy. For example, today in this ARENA party, I am a militant. It is a rightist party, conservative, which has been leaning more towards the Right, more center-Right—we believe in the

Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez, Fourth Brigade Commander, 1982 and 1984-1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 October 1987.

Western capitalist system with social justice for all. But we don't want someone to impose on us a system of government similar to that of Mexico's, a PRI party dictatorship, with tremendous corruption. Nobody can make a move unless the PRI allows it. We had the feeling that North American policy is what your ambassador represents here. It's as if they wanted the Christian Democrats to remain in the government. And if that is so, through a very refined imposition, with computers and such—it has been said that the Christian Democrats achieved power due to the U.S. support in computers. I believe it will be very dangerous for the U.S. policy, because then there will be violence from one side and the other. We believe that, in that sense, the U.S. Ambassador has played a rather sad role, I'll tell you sincerely. I am a friend of yours. I have been very friendly with former ambassadors, and we consider this ambassador to be too partial towards the Christian Democrats. That's concerning us and is creating and generating a nationalist feeling, very nationalist.



## *Stalemate and the Need for Strategy*

### *The Economic Element of the Plan Is Lacking*

**General John R. Galvin**—A great deal of the dissatisfaction of the people of El Salvador is based on economic conditions, and we have not been able to help El Salvador to the extent that the country has overcome economic stagnation. That may in part be attributed to a lack of capability of the administration of El Salvador, and it may be in part attributable to the ways in which we have gone about helping them, or the lack of enough support. Because of that, the guerrillas have been partially successful in keeping up this discontent. After the earthquake, where El Salvador and the city of San Salvador suffered damages that amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars, there wasn't any money around that could be used to reconstruct the city. So, even today, in the city there is a great deal of discontent. There are homeless people. There's great suffering that has gone on. I had hoped that that would be recognized by not only the United States but all the world and that the democratic countries of the world would contribute something

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.

to help El Salvador. But that really never came about. The United States contributed, I believe, 50 million dollars initially, and I don't believe much more after that. I may be mistaken there, but I don't think that our aid for that disaster went much over 50 million dollars. You could check that out. At any rate, the level of discontent has not gone down because the economic situation has not changed, and that is the basic problem right now. It's not so much the proselytizing by the Marxist guerrillas of the FMLN, as it is the economic situation within the country exacerbated by this disaster.

I think that President Duarte is right to stress democracy and stress the democratic revolution. It is really a democratic counterattack against Marxism, and, if Duarte is able to carry it out at a full governmental scale, he has a good possibility of winning this war. But, if there's one thing that I would say is lacking in Duarte's plan, it is a way of dealing with the economic situation. I don't believe, as of now, that he has dealt with it adequately.

### ***The War Has Turned into a Business***

**Colonel (Retired) Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez**—It would be a major victory for the North Americans to terminate the conflict in El Salvador and strengthen a true democracy in El Salvador. I know the North Americans, and sometimes I feel somewhat cheated by them when I realize that our President is right when he says, "... I cannot take the decision because the North Americans don't want..." That's the impression he gives at the people's level, as if it were the Ambassador who rules here in the country. The truth is that no ambassador has the right to rule in another country. There can be talks, accords, but the impression we have—and that is one of the things I've seen—is that the war has turned into a business. Many say no, but I believe it's true mainly for the politicians, not for those who are out in the fields. The man who is out in the fields wants the

Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez, Fourth Brigade Commander, 1982 and 1984-1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 October 1987.

war to end quickly because he is the one who is dying. We believe the war has turned into a business so that there can be more external aid. More than military aid, economic aid, because military aid comes in the form of armament, advisors, and training. It doesn't come as money. I believe that the military part is not what is converted into riches. But aside from that, I believe that those who turn out to be more favored by the war are the government politicians, because being as we are, at war, they ask for donations, and they ask for loans. The truth is that the money ... if we take a look at U.S. aid, we'll see that alone the U.S. aid to El Salvador in the economic aspect exceeds two billion. Supposedly, that aid is for the economic development of the country. But it hasn't served as economic development. It has served as ... we've eaten up the capital. We haven't made the capital productive. That is where the frustrations come in, and that is why we see more and more resentment on the part of the Salvadoran people towards the government and for the continued U.S. policies. These people have been a truly pro-North American people, and today they are turning anti-North American. That is very dangerous, and ... they haven't wanted to see that. I believe that ... I, being a friend of the North Americans, I believe I must tell them the truth, because a friend must be told the truth—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

### ***This Country Seems Stalemated***

**C-5 Spokesperson**—Now we are in 1987, and the guerrilla forces are smaller now than they were before. That is due to defections, that is due to casualties, that is due to Army operations, that is due to the difficulty of recruitment. So there is a variety of factors as to why you have a smaller guerrilla force than you had before. However, this guerrilla force that you have now, I would say, is more effective and more committed than the one you had before. Most of the guerrillas

C-5 Spokesperson, name and position withheld by request of the individual and with the concurrence of responsible U.S. and Salvadoran officials, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 28 September 1987.

who are still in the movement have now been through all the different crises. They have been through this whole process. They have been in the war now for seven years. And now these guys have already adjusted themselves psychologically to prolonged popular war. They have accepted the need to abandon the large columns and operate in small units.

Furthermore, the progress of democracy now in this country seems to be stalemated. The Christian Democratic party itself had all kinds of internal struggles. Duarte does not have the charisma that he once had. He has lost it I would say. He is not seen as a national leader who embodies the popular will any more. He is seen as just another politician with all sorts of problems. There is widespread dissatisfaction across the board with the Christian Democratic government. To the extent of, even within the party, having serious internal conflicts. The democratic elections and the coming of Duarte on the scene was at one time a great morale depressor for the guerrillas. Now that factor is removed. Now they see Duarte as gradually weakening. They see the whole democratic process as weakening. They see the economic problems of this country as working in their favor.

The psychological attitude of the guerrillas has changed. You don't have all the forced conscripts you had in there. If they were forced at one time, by now they are convinced. They are *comprometidos* [compromised]. Plus you have people who really have no other alternative. Unemployment is at its highest rate ever in this country, so if a guerrilla does turn himself in, what is he going to go back to? One of the things that worked to our favor in '84 and '85 was the hope that things were going to improve. Now, everybody thinks that things are going to get worse. I am not just talking about guerrillas. I am talking about conservative parties, the Christian Democratic party, everybody. They just see the economic, social, and political situation of this country as going downhill. They see Duarte as a political failure. All this motivates the remaining guerrillas to stay in the movement. They are saying, "Maybe our commanders are right. Maybe if we just hang in there, in the end we'll triumph. Maybe this prolonged popular war will work

out to our advantage." In the absence of any kind of viable alternative for these people if they do turn themselves in—they are going to stay with the guerrillas until they die. Plus, a lot of people like being guerrillas. It's a lot better than being a peasant, earning a dollar a day or whatever it is.

### *Reinforcing the Stalemate*

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**—So we've nearly arrived at a point where additional infusions of training, materiel, and various other elements of security assistance won't move us toward the ultimate goal of defeating the insurgency but will merely reinforce the stalemate. We've reached the point of diminishing returns, and we're going to reach a stalemate pretty soon where all we can do is maintain our present position. The guerrillas have had to change the way they operate. They operate in smaller groups, pull back and hide out more in the hills, resort to terrorism, and so forth. But they can continue in that mode literally forever, and we have not yet developed a strategy nor a policy with a proper objective.

But the government and the military must have a plan that sees them from where they are right now, through final insurgency termination, an acceptable termination. They must determine what all the intermediate steps are and have plans for mustering the necessary resources to achieve each one of those intermediate goals. Only at that point can they say they have the initiative. To stop in midstream and say, "We've got the initiative," and not know where the hell you're going from there is bullshit! That's why I said I understand what you're saying. On a strictly military basis, you say you've got the initiative. But in terms of El Salvador's goals as a nation to survive politically and the conflicting and contrasting goals of the guerrilla to obtain total power, the initiative is out there someplace, and nobody has it right now because neither side can see a way to the final conclusion.

Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986.

The guerrillas believe that the United States will quit, and they'll ultimately win. In that sense, they, the guerrillas, believe that they still have the initiative. For us to say that we have the initiative just because we've stabilized the situation and stopped them for the time being is a misrepresentation of the situation. To have the initiative in an insurgency implies much more than simply a general stabilization.

### ***They Don't Have a National Plan***

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**—When I first talked to the CINC about this job and received my charter, it was basically an extended “kissss [sic].” It was—keep it small, keep it simple, keep it sustainable, keep it Salvadoran. And, make the National Plan go. Which implies that we have a National Plan. Talk to anybody about what the National Plan is or isn't, and you will get as many answers as you talk to people. Or if you get one common answer it will be UPR [Unidos Para Reconstruir]. But United to Reconstruct is not a National Plan. It's largely a military-generated effort which talks to getting the government back out into the rural areas, extending those government services back out there, getting schools, clinics, water, streets, getting your *alcaldía* [city hall] rebuilt.

Those sorts of things, which are all very important and a part of a National Plan, but that is not the National Plan. The National Plan would imply that it is an all encompassing, centrally directed and coordinated effort; where UPR would be a component part thereof. We don't have that. We don't have that central organism that would drive it. We do have CONARA [National Committee for Restoration of Areas], which is very key in UPR, and we have an executive committee for UPR, but it's not a National Security Council or any organization of that level. That's a basic failing. It goes back to that earlier point. We don't have a fully committed, coordinated effort at winning

Colonel John C. Ellerson, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987.

this war. Can you get there from here without it? Probably, but we're killing a lot of people unnecessarily in the meantime. And so it's a big issue and it's a tough issue. They have a UPR. They don't have a National Plan.

A positive development—two weekends ago, in a conversation in the president's residence, I heard a suggestion made as to the creation of sort of such a thing and some names put next to it. It wasn't a good list, and it certainly wasn't as complete as you would like to have, but at least it was a first step, and given the person who was making the recommendation, it's something that we might, hopefully, begin to see some forward movement. A key failing—they don't have a National Security Council. They don't have a National Plan.

### ***Strategic and Tactical Objectives Must Strike at Centers of Gravity***

**Colonel Orlando Zepeda**—I think that one of our main objectives should be to try and divide the FMLN-FDR union. Another objective is to weaken these factions. The FMLN consists of five groups—FPL, ERP, PRTC, FAL, and FARN. They are each directed by a *comandante*. I think today the most powerful are the ERP and FPL. Our main objective here is to confront the ERP, which deals with the military aspects of this struggle as headed by Joaquín Villalobos. Apparently, after the death of Cayetano Carpio he took over the command of this organization. Strategically, our goal is to weaken the structure of such an organization because it is what drives the struggle even further. Tactically, we must strike heavy blows against them; probably not a guerrilla or a squadron commandant, specifically, but we must strike at the centers of power, the command groups. We must strike by the use of covert operations, infiltration, surprise attacks, night attacks. And with small units moving very rapidly. At this point we are no longer using our battalion-size units but, rather, are training our men to

Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H., C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. 1985 to 1987, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987.

organize in smaller units of 15-20 men. Our forces will then be able to infiltrate more easily and strike heavier blows against the guerrillas. However, I believe that our first priority must be to divide this union, provoke and deepen the divergencies between them, and deprive them of the logistics and economic support coming from abroad. Unfortunately, most of their economic support comes from humanitarian organizations in the United States. Much of it also comes from Europe, and we have reason to believe that most of their logistic support comes from Russia. We must deprive them of this support. Their most immediate access comes through Nicaragua, and that is the biggest problem we face. If Nicaragua changes its government, we will have won this war because that is the principal source of logistic support for the guerrillas. Whether it be a base for their propaganda and planning, it is still the epicenter of this conflict. Most of the guerrilla leaders of El Salvador, such as Villalobos, Ungo, Zamora, Shafik Handal, and Colindes, are constantly traveling to Nicaragua.

### ***The FMLN Cannot Win the War***

**Miguel Castellanos**—The FMLN is in no condition to win this war. Presently, it is in a period of weakness, of resistance. It is no longer on the offensive. The sabotages, the mines, the transportation strikes are all part of an operative line in a defensive framework of resistance. In other words, they are trying to maintain their position. The Sandinistas are no longer providing the same logistical flow as before. There is much less than before, because Nicaragua is being harassed politically. The Contras and the Congress are exerting a lot of pressure. Then, they don't want to provide evidence that they are helping the FMLN. It is not convenient for them. They want to consolidate their revolution even more, even if it means sacrificing the FMLN. Then, the Cubans' Central American

Comandante Miguel Castellanos, former insurgent leader, 1973 to 1985, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987.



policy is to consolidate Nicaragua, even if other organizations are weakened.

Now, that condemns the FMLN in their attempts to take power. They are in no condition to do so. When the Vietnamese took Saigon, they were successful because North Vietnam, with its regular divisions, provided thousands of tons of help on a daily basis. Not here. That is why the FMLN has diminished in its operational capability. They ambush once in awhile, they destroy a bridge here and there. In other words, militarily, the FMLN does not have the capability to achieve power. That is why now they have changed their strategy and have returned to the insurrection. They claim that by 1988-89 they will have achieved power through popular insurrection. Since there is an economic crisis, since there is unemployment, there are no jobs. Salaries are not increased, there is a high cost of living, they want to take advantage of all that so that the people will rise again. Now, the businessmen don't invest their capital here. Since 1979-80, two billion dollars have fled the country and gone to Miami. The sabotages caused by the FMLN have totalled 1,500 million dollars. That is the result of the sabotages. Then, they say that the economic crisis will cause the people to rise. Now, not all economic crises generate insurrections. You see Mexico, for example. There is no insurrection or organization there. In other words, we have it here because they want to provoke one. Now, we must prevent another fascist government from coming along as in the past. That plays into their hands, because they are able to justify violence. They won't achieve power, but they will try to turn back the democratic process. And that is what they want.

Now, what would happen if they took power? Well, they would establish a democratic revolutionary government similar to the one in Nicaragua. If they were successful militarily, they would establish a popular army where they would incorporate honest military men, not criminals. That would be the first government. They would expropriate the oligarchy's lands and put all services under state control. A false nonaligned policy at the international level. They were going to align themselves with Cuba and all the others to form a junta and try to make elections in their own manner.

Now, the fact is that that kind of government is based on a military victory. But, since they no longer have the capability, they insist on dialogues. Then, by means of a dialogue, they make a provisional government where they only ask for a share in the power. But, it is not really a share of power that they want because they start from the point that they have an army, and they are going to have more strength to fight. But the purpose of that provisional government is to buy time slowly and to continue developing in order to get ahead. That is their objective. To go to a dialogue, present their government proposal—a convergence as they refer to it—to have a share in the power that allows them to remain in the rural zones with their armed units. That is what they would ask for.

### ***The FMLN Is Being Forced to Develop a Protracted War Strategy***

**Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo**—How—I don't know, you may study what Villalobos and other comandantes say—but I don't think that they have the notion of Prolonged War. They have a notion that the war has become prolonged as a matter of fact. And, they understand that it's going to take a long time. Because even though they are doing well, . . . they are not doing so well. I won't say they're not doing so well. They're not doing so bad. That's different. But, if the FMLN doesn't come to some type of terms, the Army will get its victory in five or six years. That's an optimistic approach! That doesn't mean a complete victory, just a military win. Also, an important point is that Reagan is finishing. No matter what kind of administration follows his, the tendency will be to diminish United States support to the (Salvadoran) government. At the same time, the Soviet Union—which hasn't been nearly as involved—is likely to do the same thing for the FMLN. Reagan and Gorbachev are probably laughing together right now. Well,

Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo, President of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), 1981 to date, interviewed in Panama City, R.P., 11 December 1987.

let's forget about them, and let's try to find a solution through without them. [This interview was conducted shortly after the Washington Summit.—Eds.] In any case, there is no solution through surrendering and no solution through fighting. No conditions for either. So, I believe a negotiated settlement, instead of surrendering, is going to have to come first.

The FMLN, I believe, doesn't want to apply a Prolonged War strategy in the sense that they want to prolong the war deliberately in order to attain a maximalist solution—total victory. One argument is that time is working in their favor. But, time also deteriorates. As a result, they have developed a Protracted War strategy. This kind of strategy is necessary because they don't have the means which allow them to confront the regular army directly. So, the only means by which they can conduct the war is through a Protracted War strategy. This requires a negotiated settlement you will understand, the need to have a broad-based government—not made up of only the FMLN/FDR. Now, this is not a total victory concept. We can't afford to have a total victory. It's too costly. It's too good to be true.

That's why I think a negotiated peace in El Salvador has a good chance. But, the solution to the crisis has got to be a Salvadoran solution. Consensus is growing among the various sectors of society regarding the need to end the destruction and bloodshed of the war. Regardless of one's ideology or political party, we find that there is general agreement on the following points. First, the country can't be governed in the present situation of profound crisis and war. Second, the Duarte government has failed and can't generate the necessary support to overcome the crisis. Third, the government doesn't have the capability to militarily defeat the FMLN. Finally, the prolongation of the war will simply deepen the crisis. As long as the war continues there will be no economic recovery, no economic development—just war. And, everyone has to be involved. That's the only way to put an end to the war.

There's another reason why I think negotiated peace in El Salvador has a better chance than anything else. Right now, there's no alternative. Today, tomorrow, the day after

tomorrow—no one is surrendering. There is no chance to negotiate a surrender. No one is willing to share power. There are still no conditions for that. But, I think that in one year, two years, or three, conditions will come about for a political solution made out of ingredients we don't have now. I don't know exactly what or when that will be. You still have two armies, and you still have problems. But, I think peace is worth the necessary effort to develop the conditions that will provide a political settlement. I have learned that dreams sometimes come true, but you have to have dreams even if they don't come true. You want them to come true. You have to wait a little.

This is more than a military problem. It is political. The solution will be more political than military. The policy is to talk, and that's more political than military.

### ***No Clear Vision of Where We Want to Go***

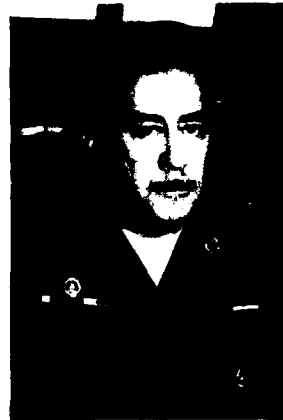
***Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova-Véjar***—I think that, with respect to the military, the various experiences obtained are the fruits of labor of the general staff in order to produce a doctrine with respect to this type of conflict. But, overlooking the entire national field, truly, we have a lesson that we need to learn. The unfortunate fact is, observing El Salvador as a state—at this time, we are confronted maybe by the greatest of the problems we've had as a nation, as a state. We are a conglomerate of five million people located in a 20,000 square kilometer area, without any clear vision of what we want to do or where we want to go. At this point especially (independent of other aspects of an international nature), I think there is more confusion now than there ever has been. Really, if you observe the national panorama, you will find that all of the democratic forces—not Communist—are completely disunited. There hasn't been any union.

Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova-Vejar, former Second Brigade Commander and now Director of the Military Academy, interviewed in Santa Ana and San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987 and 23 July 1987, respectively.

Traditionally, subversion in all Communist countries looks for coalitions with different political parties—at a given moment when they search for the power through pacific means—through elections. Then, they united with other parties to achieve power. Once this objective has been met, the Alianzas Coyunturales [Alliance of Opportunity], as they refer to it, is terminated. We have a clear example of this in Nicaragua.

But here in El Salvador, at this point, all democratic forces are polarized and disunited. I believe there is no unity, and there will be no unity unless it is sought through a national perspective. A national perspective where all sectors of the population are integrated. I believe this is the only way. Even though there would be a lot of disagreement, if we work towards one goal—El Salvador—we will be able to obtain a national consensus. We will be able to clearly determine our national objectives. We will be able to visualize where we want to go as a state. At this time I believe we don't know. If we, through an understanding, are able to determine our national objectives, I think that the polarization of forces that exists today will end. There will be a union. It doesn't matter what political party it is. The national objectives will be determined, and whatever political party exists will have to follow them, unless it is blind, because that will be the end result of all social groups in El Salvador.

Then, I think that is the principal lesson that we must learn, and we must learn it right now because the subversives have been virtually defeated militarily. But you know that the political situations produce divisiveness and these divisions can continue to threaten this democracy that we are trying to push forward. It is necessary and it is urgent to seek a unity within the sectors, that they become integrated around common



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Colonel Oscar  
Edgardo Casanova-Véjar

objectives. This should be as a result of a true appreciation separate from passionate feelings. I think that can be achieved.

Some time ago we had a march for peace where—after talking to the different political parties and their leaders—they all managed to protest against Marxism. That we do have in common. The problem is, once we end this war, if we don't know what is to become of us, there really can't be a unity because they think that at a given moment the government will want to take a different path. And it may not be that way. Then, I think, the government, as well as the interested sectors should try to promote a gathering where distinct representatives of the national tasks are integrated in order to produce this understanding.

I think that is the principal lesson we must learn: no government in the future will be able to continue or go ahead, if there is not a national consensus.

### *Toward the Future*

THE EDITORS—Understanding the past and correctly interpreting the lessons of the past are the keys to improving the present—and, possibly, the future. In these terms, the ongoing conflict in El Salvador and the combined U.S.-Salvadoran counterinsurgency effort have shown several important insights. The first, and arguably the most important, is that the defeat of military forces—the knights, mounted or dismounted—is not the central objective of either side in the battle. The strategic center of gravity in an insurgency is the legitimacy of the regime in power. The primary objective of the insurgents is to destroy that legitimacy—this is the heart of the concept of a "Prolonged People's War." The primary objective of the Salvadoran government must then be to protect, maintain, and enhance its legitimacy.

Once understanding of the key center of gravity is accepted, there are numerous other insights which impact current and future counterinsurgency efforts. As examples:

It is not necessary or even desirable to introduce foreign troops into a "people's war."

A Third World military, faced with armed struggle and dynamic social change, can be developed into an effective, professional force.

External support to an embattled government must be consistent in order to be most effective.

Sanctuaries and external aid to guerrillas are strategically critical to their ability to wage an insurgency and, therefore, must be neutralized.

Democratic institutions and human rights can be established, even under wartime conditions.

An organization which can determine, coordinate, and set the necessary political-military objectives for the conflict is a required element in a winning strategy.

The spread of totalitarian communism is not inevitable, but progress to institute alternative democratic solutions is slow in this kind of war.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that it is men and women who lead, plan, execute, and support any given conflict. As a consequence, a major concern must be individuals. Leadership and public opinion are particularly important. They are of even greater importance in "revolutionary" war. If appropriate intelligence apparatus and psychological operations are not being used to neutralize subversives and their internal and external sanctuaries, logic and experience show that the conflict will continue indefinitely in one form or another. This is a major center of gravity that requires greater consideration and the highest priority in the present and the future.

In sum, the Salvadoran conflict is not unidimensional—it is multifaceted. Each part has its corresponding threat and center of gravity. The basic problem is to constantly reevaluate the principal threat and to properly order the priority of the others. The secondary problem is to develop the capability to apply long-term political, psychological, economic, and moral

resources—not just military—to the effort. In this context, the first definitive step in the process has got to be a complete analysis of the situation and the various aspects implicit in it. Instead of debating ad hoc any given crisis as it arises, senior leaders, their staffs, and allies must consider the problem as a whole and develop the vision necessary for total success.

These are some of the major lessons that have been or are being learned in the Salvadoran case. But, what are the strategic imperatives as they are understood now?



*Part VI*

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*Thoughts for  
the Future*



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## *The Same Valley or the Next Valley*

### *The United States Must Have a High-Level Coordinating Mechanism*

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**—I would say, first, that in the failure of the United States effectively to study, assess, write histories about, and reach conclusions on these types of wars we are condemned to refight and rediscover them.

Secondly, it's very important when we deal with this kind of a conflict that we deal with it on a coordinated basis.

The next stage after being able to understand what happened before is to have some distilled wisdom to build on as a result of having taken a look at what has gone before. I would say that U.S. Government organization dealing with these kinds of problems needs a lot of work. We understand, intrinsically, the need for an integrated approach, but we haven't yet developed the facilities to keep all tracks running smoothly, to keep them all running along together, and to find ways to bring the necessary people together who need to cooperate. One of the things that has always seemed to me to make the most sense was to try to find a way to have an integrated backup mechanism in Washington to support all facets of the effort.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985, interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987.

The Embassy was a natural focus of attention and cooperation in the field, and together with the arrangements that we worked out with the unified command, it gave us an in-the-field opportunity to focus our time and attention on the important question. But there was always a problem of disjointed, uncoordinated backup in Washington. There was no bureaucratic mechanism put in place to handle that aspect of what was going ahead. I think problems that are likely to be more serious than El Salvador—El Salvador is serious enough—will require some real thought about reorganization. I would think that a multiagency coordinating mechanism, particularly for dealing with major policy decisions—it doesn't need to be a daily mechanism but at least a weekly mechanism for running through an entire review of all the issues devoted particularly to the country involved—having high enough level people to make decisions (assistant secretary and higher) would be very important in order successfully to prosecute this kind of an effort. It would require coordination of resources, time, and attention. In addition, you need a more coordinated intelligence backup and support. The CAJIT was developed, and it functioned quite well. We had real-time communications problems, though, problems of routing through SOUTHCOM, routing through the intelligence community, routing through technical intelligence support facilities in the United States. On the other hand, they did good work and kept us up to date on what they saw happening in operational intelligence.

### ***Democracy Can Be Supported***

**General Fred F. Woerner**—Another primary lesson that can be learned, and it is not exclusively to be learned in the Salvadoran experience, is that democracy is a suitable form of government in the Third World. We've been through many eras. We went through, certainly, an era of what I would call

General Fred F. Woerner, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985, interviewed at the Presidio of San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986.

ideological arrogance in which democracy in the U.S. format was the only acceptable form of government.... We find out that democracy in its multiplicity of styles can serve a multiplicity of conditions for peoples at varying levels of development. I think this is a very important lesson because it offers to us the opportunity to work together towards greater commonality of purpose. We do not find ourselves in a dilemma of believing that we must support a dictatorship because the people are not ready for democracy because it's too complex for them, and thus in our fundamental opposition to the spread of communism, we align ourselves with the ultra-Right. What Guatemala, along with many others—Salvador, along with many others—has demonstrated is that this is fallacious. There is a democratic design which is appropriate and can serve the interest of people at varying levels of political and economic development. And, thus we can align ourselves to, on the high ground, that appropriate ideal that is compatible with our own political ideal for mankind in our opposition to the spread of Marxism/communism.

### ***A Must: Support for Central American Democracies***

**Ambassador Edwin G. Corr**—So, we have gone from a period of supporting the Sandinistas to suspending support to defining exactly just who the Sandinistas are—Marxist/Leninists, and that Sandinista goals are inimical to our national interests—to a debate over how to respond to the Sandinistas that focused primarily on containment versus democratization, and, now, we have now reached a point that saying democratization is necessary. We still are trying to work out within our own society how to bring about the attainment of our

Ambassador Edwin G. Corr, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1985 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 1 June 1987 and 24 September 1987.

three foreign policy objectives toward Nicaragua: (a) breaking the Soviet/Cuban connection, (b) preventing Nicaraguan subversion of its neighbors, and (c) democratizing Nicaragua.

During the past six or seven years, the success of El Salvador in reducing human rights abuses, consolidating democracy, fighting the war, and coping with economic problems has made possible support for our entire Central American foreign policy. Similar developments in Honduras and Guatemala likewise have enabled greater support for policies against Nicaragua. We must continue to support the four Central American democracies and democratize the other, Nicaragua, in order to protect our strategic interests and contribute to a free and democratic world.

### ***The Indispensable Requirement for Intelligence***

**General Wallace H. Nutting**—Another lesson is the indispensable requirement for intelligence. If you do not have a system, an intelligence collection system, with an analytical capability and distribution process that can feed first and policy formulation process in a sensible way and then coordinate an execution, then you can't get to first base. And there is, in my view, an unreasonable tendency still for a lot of reasons to rely on technical means, which are much less relevant in this form of conflict. We don't do the human intelligence thing very well. The capability that we did have, we dismantled 10 years ago or more. What we put back together is too slow in coming and inadequate for long periods of time. I think we in the government have to acknowledge the indispensable need for intelligence and put together a system that combines the best capabilities of technical means and human sources and locate the analytical capability where it can operate most efficiently and go from there. We haven't done that very well.

General Wallace H. Nutting, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983, interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987.

## ***A Broad Program for Training U.S. Personnel Is Needed***

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**—I had been in Central America once before in the sixties as an aid director in Guatemala, where I first met Fred Woerner. He was in the civic action program at the time, the military side. That was in connection with the Alliance for Progress, and I learned a valuable lesson. I think about if we had stayed in Central America, if we had continued with modest amounts of resources. (We go by spurts, we take an interest, we get tired of it. And we back away and in a year or so we're sorry.) It's been said many times, and this is a good example of what happens. During the Carter administration some intelligence agencies extensions were closed; we didn't have any activity. Our enemies in the world were very active and were working hard to put things together. We had made some difference in the sixties and made some programs, but in the seventies we lost interest in the politics, and as we lost interest we were no longer as important players. We didn't put any money in, in fact, . . . so I think the main lesson is that it is a very difficult area, close to the United States. It is going to be important to the United States for generations. So one had better be prepared to be helpful, supportive in the long term. We would never have been in the mess we got into if we'd had wiser policies. We wouldn't even have had Sandinistas, in full control in Nicaragua, providing outside support for a revolution in El Salvador. It never should have happened. Lots of mistakes we made did damage. We should try and avoid them in the future. . . . That lack of national interest and commitment. Closing down their (intelligence) stations in countries like that—they are small banana republics—they don't matter. If it saves them money at the time. And they assume it won't ever happen again.

Ambassador Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983, interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987.

Another thing that I harp on all the time, and I haven't pressed it anywhere here, is that the Salvadoran situation requires a broad program to deal with the problems. You can't just have a military program or say, "let's have elections," and everything will be honky dory or say, "let's have agrarian reform." It requires a meshing of all kinds of elements in society. Basic elements of Salvadoran society are sick, and it takes a long time to fix it, with sophisticated mutual supportive programs.

### ***Some Interests Must Be Sacrificed***

**President José Napoleón Duarte**—I have established up until now three major policies. The first is the policy of "sliding," the second is the policy of devaluation, and the third is the policy of consolidation. Each policy responds to a reality. In a process of economic erosion, each one means a political erosion. But it was an historical need to take those decisions even though those pragmatic decisions didn't respond to all the desires in a way in which I would have liked. In other words, I have had to sacrifice some values of ideological thinking in order to provide the country an escape—a hope towards a better future. I am paying the political price today for the benefit of tomorrow. I have had to sacrifice in each of the fields, especially in the political field. This peace process, which is not easy, ... the Central American peace process, the Arias Plan, has impacted how we can act in spite of the political risks we are running. The risks we've run are transcended by decisions—such as the amnesty, the cease-fire, permitting a group of leaders linked to the FMLN to come into the country—but have caused us a lot of political commotion. It would be easy just to tell them no, but the principles in this case outweigh the risks. If I told you that I've followed certain rationale or suggestions, there are others which haven't been followed. And that also implies confrontations with U.S. policy, when I have had to say, "... this is the position, and I don't accept changes nor

José Napoleón Duarte, President Republic of El Salvador, 1984 to present, interviewed in El Salvador, 20 November 1987.

influences nor pressures in order to achieve our objectives.” And that is valid for a series of concepts. As a matter of fact, there is a chapter which is not told, and it is probably what could be referred to as, “Is Duarte’s government a puppet of the U.S.?” or “Is he not a puppet of the U.S.?” That chapter would be truly revealing if I could tell you some things which you would want me to tell.

### ***The People Are the Equation***

**General John R. Galvin**—The major lesson concerns the triangle. If you draw yourself a triangle and put the guerrillas at one corner, the government at the other corner, and the people at the third corner, you have the equation. The government must fight the guerrillas in such a way that it achieves the confidence of the people because, after all, that is what the guerrillas are really seeking. Both the guerrillas and the government are fighting to gain the people. Every action that is taken must have that triangle as its base. That is the most important lesson to be learned. Now, to move to the military, the lesson is that the military must fight the war in such a way that it, the military, maintains the confidence of the people. That means it must be correct ethically and morally and, of course, professionally. It’s not good enough just to be good guys. You have to know how to fight, too. There needs to be a balance of these elements. You have to be good, solid fighters, and you have to be able to gain the confidence of the people.

General John R. Galvin, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987, interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987.



# *Witnesses to the Conflict in El Salvador*

## *Oral History: The Interviews*

THE MAJORITY OF THE CONTENTS of this book is selected from interviews as listed below. The interviews are recorded and now part of the collection at the Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

**General Adolfo Onecifero Blandón**, Chief of Staff of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1984 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987 and 26 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General Juan Bustillo**, Chief of the Salvadoran Air Force, 1979 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 January 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**C-5 Spokesperson**, no dates, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 28 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya**, former Fifth Brigade Commander and now First Brigade Commander. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 21 July 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Oscar Edgardo Casanova-Vejar**, former Second Brigade Commander and now Director of the Military Academy. He was interviewed in Santa Ana and San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987 and 23 July 1987, respectively. Both interviews were done by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel John Cash**, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1981 to 1983. He was interviewed in Washington, D.C., 20 March 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Miguel Castellanos**, former insurgent Comandante, 1973-1985, He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 25 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Ambassador Edwin G. Corr**, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1985 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 1 June 1987 and 24 September 1987. Both interviews were done by Max G. Manwaring.

**José Napoleón Duarte**, President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1984 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 20 November 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Lyman C. Duryea**, U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, 1983-1985. He was interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 4 March 1986, by Lieutenant Colonel Emil R. Bedard, U.S. Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel L.R. Vasquez, U.S. Army.

**Dr. Luigi R. Einaudi**, Director, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, Bureau of Interamerican Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1977 to date. He was interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel John C. Ellerson**, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1986 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 27 and 28 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General John R. Galvin**, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1985 to 1987. He was interviewed in Mons, Belgium, 18 August 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General José Guillermo García**, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1979 to 1984. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 2 July 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez**, member of the civil-military junta which took control of the Salvadoran government after deposing General Carlos Humberto Romero on 15 October 1979. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Leopoldo Antonio Hernández**, former First Brigade Commander and now Vice-Chief of Staff of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 23 January 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Robert M. Herrick**, Director, U.S. Southern Command's Small Wars Operations Research (SWORD) Directorate, 1986 to 1987 and Chief U.S. Investigating Officer at El Paraíso, 1987. He was interviewed in Washington, D.C., 26 October 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Ambassador Deane Hinton**, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1982 to 1983. He was interviewed in Washington, D.C., 10 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Dr. Alvaro Magaña**, Provisional President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1982 to 1984. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 18 December 1986, 30 June 1987, and 21 November 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila**, Salvadoran Vice-Minister of Public Security, 1984 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General Wallace H. Nutting**, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command, 1979 to 1983. He was interviewed in Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa Pérez**, Fourth Brigade Commander, 1982 to 1985. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 October 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Ambassador Thomas Pickering**, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, 1983 to 1985. He was interviewed in Tel Aviv, Israel, 25 August 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel René Emilio Ponce**, former C-3 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and now Commander of the Third Brigade. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel James J. Steele**, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986. All the interviews were conducted by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Charles B. Stone IV**, member of the team which wrote the "Woerner Report," 1982. He was interviewed in Panama City, R.P., 4 December 1986, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Joseph S. Stringham III**, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1983 to 1984. He was interviewed in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 29 May 1985, by Colonel Charles A. Carlton, Jr., U.S. Army.

**Major General James R. Taylor**, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama), 1986 to 1987. He was interviewed at Fort Amador, R.P., 14 December 1986, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo**, President of FDR (Revolutionary Democratic Front), 1981 to date. He was interviewed in Panama City, R.P., 11 December 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova**, Salvadoran Minister of Defense, 1984 to date. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 19 December 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel John D. Waghelstein**, U.S. Military Group Commander in El Salvador, 1982 to 1983. He was interviewed in Washington, D.C., 23 February 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

**General Fred F. Woerner**, Commander, U.S. 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama) and Deputy USCINCSO for Central America, 1982 to 1985. He was interviewed in San Francisco, California, 7 November 1986, by Max G. Manwaring.

**Colonel Juan Orlando Zepeda H.**, C-2 of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, 1985 to 1987. He was interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 22 January 1987, by Max G. Manwaring.

## Other Sources

THE FOLLOWING LIST OF BOOKS, interviews, articles, and documents includes those items which we found useful in writing this book. Where an interview or other work has been republished, we provide the later publisher and date.

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## *The Editors*

**Max G. Manwaring** has been professionally involved in Latin America since 1964. At that time, he was a Fulbright-NDEA Fellow in Brazil, and he subsequently wrote his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Illinois on the military in Brazilian politics. During the years since then, Dr. Manwaring has studied, taught, written, and been involved in Latin American political-military subject matter.

His interest in El Salvador dates from his service in the Political-Military Directorate of the United States Southern Command (J-5, USSOUTHCOM) from 1980 to 1982, and as Chief of the Central America Section in the Research Directorate of the Defense Intelligence Agency from 1982 to 1984. It was during these periods that the insurgency in El Salvador reached its greatest momentum and provided the greatest challenge to United States' interests in Central America and to the concept of democracy.

After leaving DIA, Dr. Manwaring served as the Latin American regional security affairs analyst at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, then returned to Panama as the Deputy Director of the Southern Command's Small Wars Operations Research Directorate (SWORD). He is currently a senior analyst with Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Inc.

This book was written while both Max Manwaring and Court Prisk were working in support of the SOUTHCOM Commander-in-Chief's desire to revitalize strategic thinking as it pertains to "small wars."

**Court Prisk**, a 1959 U.S. Military Academy graduate, with master's degrees in Public Administration (Organizational Behavior) and Business Administration (Finance), has been involved in the strategic analysis of international and regional

affairs since 1971. At that time, as a faculty member of the Strategic Studies Committee, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Colonel Prisk was responsible for developing major courses of instruction in Executive-Congressional Relations, Ideology, and Analysis of U.S. Interests.

It was during this three-year assignment that he first teamed with Max Manwaring to develop an interactive international affairs board game entitled, Regional Advantage Military-Political Affairs (RAMP).

After graduation from the Air War College in 1979, Colonel Prisk served as the executive officer for the JCS Representative to the SALT II negotiations, as an action officer in the Strategic Negotiations Division, OJCS-J5, and as the Chief, Middle East/Africa Regional Plans Branch, Political/Military Affairs Division, OJCS-J5.

Colonel Prisk retired from the U.S. Army in December 1983. For the past two years he has served in Panama as a Strategic Analyst for Booz, Allen & Hamilton in support of USSOUTHCOM's Small Wars Operations Research Directorate and most recently as a senior associate for Booz, Allen & Hamilton in support of the U.S. Special Operations Command. His interest in El Salvador combines a strong sense of the fundamentally ideological nature of international affairs, a desire to not see the United States commit the same strategic errors he witnessed while in Vietnam in 1966-67 and 1969-70, and the pressing need to develop an understanding of the current and impending problems in Latin America



# ***EL SALVADOR AT WAR***

## ***An Oral History of Conflict from the 1979 Insurrection to the Present***

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